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Christopher
Jezebel
The Burden of a Woman
Elementary Jane
Time and the Woman
David Penstephen

DAVID PENSTEPHEN

By RICHARD PRYCE

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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THE FIRST BOOK OF DAVID

DAVID PENSTEPHEN

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

One of David's early recollections was of being taken out of his warm bed in what seemed like the middle of the night, but was really towards six o'clock of a winter's morning, and dressed by cold candlelight for one of the journeys to which he had been accustomed ever since he was born. Most of his recollections had to do with travelling. This one, more vivid somehow than the rest, stood out afterwards from its fellows. He was still half asleep when he was lifted from the warm pillow, and, protesting, whimpering even a little, he tried to go to sleep again during the first stages of his toilet.

"Now, Master David. Wake up. Wake up, will you? Wake up like a good boy, or are you going to be a naughty one? 'Ow do you think I'm to get you dressed if you lollop like that, to say nothing of your little sister good as gold over there and surprised at you! With the train to catch and all, do you hear me? There! Let's 'elp, for goodness sake, 'stead of 'inderin'. Put your arms in; now over your little head. That's right. Caught his poor fingers, did I? Careless old Betsy! Ought to know better, did n't she? There's a boy — there's a little man, though. And now for the wash wash wash."

The wash wash wash woke him. The water was n't properly hot and Betsy was in a hurry. He squirmed and wriggled — 'indering, it is to be feared, very much more than he 'elped. Perhaps the water was nearly cold; perhaps Betsy's hands, which were kind, were rough. Perhaps the

soap did get into his eyes, as he said. But he was awake at last and presently he was dressed.

He stood by the table then and watched Betsy go through much the same exercises with Georgina. Georgina had the advantage of him, however, in having been wide awake by the time her turn came. Georgina made no fuss. Presently two dressed children stood by the table, and watched Betsy as, having finished them, she proceeded to finish herself.

Something had happened the night before. Things often did happen. Later, when David was old enough to observe, he knew that there was something connected with the family that made 'things' always liable to happen. His father's face would wear a frown and his mother's an anxious but unsurprised look, and generally it would not be long before they moved on somewhere else. Arrivals, departures, unpackings and packings, trains, porters, cloakrooms, luggage, *douanes*, omnibuses, hotels, hotel servants, lodgings, beds with curtains, beds without curtains, beds with mosquito nets, beds in recesses: these were life and life was these. David aged seven took these and took this for granted — for a matter and for matters of course.

There was himself, and there was Father (when there was Father, that is, for sometimes Father was not there), and Mother (almost always Mother), and quite always Betsy. There was also Georgina — since the arrival of Georgina. That was the family. What there was n't, though David did not know it yet, was a home. David's mother, with the pale gentle face and the tired eyes, had almost given up hope that there ever would be.

David had been born at Calais of all places — the mark of the bird of passage on him for always. Some sand, a Tower, and a Gate. But the painters have always known Calais. And Calais: is it not itself a Gate? Most seemly place for your birth, David. One of the gates of France. A little Frenchman? A certain rise in the young days. Georgina was a native of Florence. By the Calais argu-

ment Georgina would be held an Italian. You might thus have brothers and sisters every one of whom was of a different nationality, German, Spanish, Austrian, Norwegian — Oriental even at a stretch. Which 'like Euclid' was absurd. You were, of course, what your father was, and David's father was English. So David the schoolboy; before he learned that, even at the cost of hearing himself called a foreigner, it was better, perhaps, not to speak of his father at all. Time enough. It was not near his schooldays yet. He was still very much in the nursery, where, though strictly speaking, it was n't a nursery, since it was a bedroom in a hotel, the most intimate and domestic things happened.

Betsy's toilet was always enthralling — such portions of it as her charges were permitted to see performed. These consisted chiefly in the hooking of her stays, an ordinance always put off to the last possible moment and accomplished to a sort of suspended or sectional indrawing of the breath; and perhaps the doing of Betsy's hair — a large portion of which went on ready done. Then came Betsy's dress, and behold Betsy the shape which she took for the day.

"Does n't it hurt?" David asked this morning when all was done.

"What hurt?" said Betsy, patting her chignon.

"Not your hair. Nor," as she smoothed out her creases, "buttoning your dress. But when you get the brass things into the eyes. You have to go grunt, grunt, grunt, you know, Betsy."

"Have to go grunt, grunt, grunt," echoed Georgina.

Betsy knocked their heads together smiling.

A waiter, not the one that David had made friends with the day before, came to say that breakfast was ready, and the three went into the sitting-room next door, where the children found their mother and flew to her, and where their father presently joined them.

Nobody talked much after Mr. Penstephen appeared,

except Georgina, who from her place beside Betsy kept up a patter of baby prattle.

"Betsy goes grunt, grunt, grunt," she announced à propos of nothing; and Betsy said, "'Ush, Miss Georgy. Eat your nice bread and milk like a little lady. Look at Master David."

"Is the children's luggage ready?" Mr. Penstephen asked, breaking his own silence.

"I've only to fasten the straps, sir."

Mrs. Penstephen had been crying, she saw. She, Betsy, had heard something of what had happened.

"No, eat your own breakfast, Betsy," Mrs. Penstephen said gently. "One of the eggs is for you. I'll look after Miss Georgy presently while you see to the things. Yes, David, when you've drunk your milk you can have a little coffee."

"Grunt, grunt, grunt," said Georgina again.

Betsy looked at her master from under her eyebrows, rather to see whether the little girl's prattle was irritating him than from any apprehension for what might come, and smiled to herself.

But "That's what little pigs say," Mr. Penstephen said, running his hand over his daughter's curls.

How kind he was really. How kind — and him so wrong! Why could n't he make her mistress happy? It was plain to see how she suffered. And all for views — just views. Not sinfulness; not deliberate sinfulness. There was no obstacle — no cause or impediment. Just views and cleverness; and look how these things affected those whom he loved! She watched him with his child — his girl child; his boy he did not understand so well. Yet "Now, David, your coffee — and a nice flat lump of sugar"; he loved his boy too. All for views and cleverness — wrong-headedness *she* called it. Wrong-headedness, obstinacy. "I should just like to shake him."

Her egg was delicious — as good as an English egg, though it had been laid by a Belgian hen. She had been

up since before five o'clock packing, and was hungry. Betsy enjoyed her breakfast.

"Now 'm. A quarter of an hour will see us ready."

Georgina had finished her breakfast, David his; so she took the children with her, while her mistress went to put on her hat and coat, and her master to pay the bill.

There were no cheerful leave-takings in that hotel. No au revoirs from bowing officials and servants. Even the waiter whom David had made friends with kept out of the way. But to David's delight, at the very moment when his father was saying, "We never set foot *there* again," David espied him looking out from behind one of the blinds in the coffee-room, and received a deprecating wave of the hand from him which he longed to but dared not return. The Penstephens were leaving Brussels in gravest displeasure.

Then came the usual journey. But every journey was a new adventure to the funny little boy in the Scotch cap, the knickerbocker suit, the knitted comforter, and the pilot's-cloth great-coat. Children were oddly dressed in those days — but so was every one else. David's father, for instance, wore a black coat and check trousers travelling, and changed his rather square felt hat in the train for a cap which had been bought at a bookstall. His mother wore what was known as a "polonaise," a round sealskin jacket, and a hat which sloped up towards the back from her forehead; a string of onyx beads as large as marbles round her neck; and carried her watch in a watch-pocket. Betsy wore . . . but, goodness, what did not Betsy? — who was the shape, moreover, if not quite the size, of a pillar box! Yet the family looked distinguished. People, pointing them out or asking perhaps who they were, said, "Those nice-looking people," — till they were told, when they left out 'nice-looking' at once and put worlds of meaning into what remained. Those people! Those. Betsy was thus the imposing servitor of the distinguished, or the damaged hanger-on of the damaged, and both, in less time than it takes to say so.

David kneeling on the seat looked out of the window — not the big square window of these days, but a pane shaped like the lower half of a moon in its second quarter. Dusty blue curtains, hung on ivory rings, had to be pushed back from time to time.

"What are you looking at, David?"

He was so intent that his mother had to repeat her question.

"What do you see out there?"

He started and turned back to the inside of the compartment.

"The telegraph wires."

Then David's mother watched them too. They dipped, down, down. Now they were going up. They seemed to be engaged in a struggle to rise. Up. Up. They were going up. They would go surely right up to where they would be safe. When they seemed nearest to the attainment of their wish, a pole suddenly, and down they would come again with a rush! It was as if they could not escape? — evade? They were like many things, but mostly things hunted or trapped: hunted things seeking covert and overtaken at the brink of safety; hunted people — slaves, say — making for sanctuary, detected, caught or shot down; flies that nearly succeeded in disentangling themselves from webs; men trying to rise — perhaps on 'stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things,' but always, always dragged down; creatures swimming for dear life ever to be washed back with the wave that had brought them almost to the shore.

"Germany next, David. How shall you like that?"

"Groschen," said David who had been there and knew.

"Kreuzers," said his father. "More in your line, my son."

"Koitzers," echoed Georgina.

"Marks," said David stoutly.

"Marks," said Georgina.

"I once had a florin," said David.

They had the compartment to themselves. The racks were full of their luggage: valises, the carpetbag, the hold-all, 'straps,' a square box in a brown holland cover bound with red tape: the odd hand-luggage of the sixties and seventies — a dressing-case (Mother's) with tortoise-shell fittings inside it, including a comb with a tail; another dressing-case (Father's) with silver fittings and a secret drawer; the Dispatch Box (also Father's); some toys; a watering-can put to strange uses; The Shawl (a large plaid square capable of enveloping both children) and some rugs. Mrs. Penstephen was wrong if she thought that her children had no home.

What a domestic scene they and these must have presented, David often thought when he looked back to the young years of the travelling! The intimate, familiar things which accompanied them made the railway carriage an intimate, familiar place — fit setting for the family group. Father, mother, son, daughter, with Betsy servant and friend.

All the odd luggage, even to the corded trunks in the luggage van, had the tender value in retrospect of things loved and lost. No household gods, no chairs or tables or sofas or cupboards or chests-of-drawers or book-cases or pictures, were ever more closely connected with a life than, say, the holland-covered box with David's. He had lived his seven years to the sight of it. It was as much a part of his mother as the rings on her fingers, and it was thus somehow a very part of him.

And how respectable! Respectability must have been the dominant note of that assemblage of persons and things. An English gentleman of good position and sufficient means, an English lady of delicate and 'refined' appearance, their well-bred presentable children, their children's elderly comfortable nurse: the valises, carpetbag, hold-all, dressing-cases, straps, etc., etc. Could Mr. and Mrs. Grundy themselves with family and luggage have shown more blameless a front?

Now came the guard to look at the tickets, climbing dangerously along the footboard outside the carriages, and, the window having been let down, putting his head and shoulders in at the aperture.

"Ze tickets."

"Father can speak French," David had to say, and wanted to add, "Even I can."

"Les billets, alors, Monsieur," said the guard, bowing to David who fetched them from his father, and handed them one by one — three wholes and two halves as he pointed out — to the guard who proceeded to clip them. Georgina on Betsy's knee had to be held up to see too.

A domestic scene. All that there was of most domestic and respectable.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING had, indeed, happened at the hotel in Brussels — the sort of thing that had always been liable to happen, only somehow rather more dreadful than ever had happened before. Aloofness was the most that happened generally — aloofness covering coldness, recedings, withdrawals, and the usual starings or blindnesses. People saw the Penstephens only too well, or did not see them at all. They made friendly overtures — to the children, perhaps, the strange little ruminant David, or the engaging Georgina — and, inexplicably, or anyway unexplainedly, retreated. David deep down in his soul had always known. Georgina, too young, and also too content, to be perceptive, did not know. But this time things had gone further.

Some one — a great lady, an old client, the kind that bowing hotel managers dare not or will not offend — had given her ultimatum. "Either those people or I."

The scraping manager was to take his choice. It had of course to be Those People. Madame, with her companion who was almost her lady-in-waiting, her secretary, her maids (two) and her courier, had a suite upon the first floor. Her ultimatum, since she breakfasted, lunched, and dined in her own apartments, and need, and would, it is probable, have seen as little of the persons who outraged her as if continents instead of stairs and corridors had separated her from them, was preposterous — a piece of self-righteous despotism. But she had spoken. They or she. The matter, the hotel manager gathered, had something to do with the roof. Madame, representing outraged virtue, and they, open scandal, could not, it seemed, sleep under the same slates.

"If I put them in the Dépendance? A separate entrance as Madame knows. Only the public salons. I go to

Monsieur. I say, 'Your rooms un'appily we find engaged. A mistake most regrettable. An erreur. But in the Dépendance . . .'"

Madame felt her bracelets — slabs of jet upon parallel strings of elastic; the centre slab on each wrist showing, if you please, a coronet in diamonds — and was silent. She had spoken.

"Oh, pardon, miladi. It shall be as Madame wishes. But of course. I go to Monsieur without delay. The rooms engaged; the Dépendance un'appily quite full. Ça s'arrangera."

Her great-ladyship bowed.

"The gentleman will understand, I think," she said grimly. "But I give you full permission to mention my name."

The companion, who scraped nearly as much as the manager, said, "I think you're quite right," as soon as the manager had scraped himself out of the room. "Quite, quite right."

"Of course I'm right."

"Yes, that's what I say, dear."

"Of course it's what you say."

"Well, I only —"

"Yes, dear, I know."

We leave these ladies agreeing with each other.

The manager's part was more difficult. He had 'agreed,' to be sure, but in a different sense, and he wished himself well through a bad quarter of an hour. These old women were monsters. As well hope to reason with basilisks. He did not suppose that the 'un'appily engaged' would work with Mr. Penstephen. He did not see himself saying that the Dépendance was full either. He did not, for that matter, see the Dépendance entering at all into the question. Scraping might do the thing. There was, of course, always insolence to fall back upon. But he did not somehow see himself, or indeed any one else, being insolent to Mr. Penstephen.

The old woman had said that he might mention her name. So be it.

He nerved himself to what might be before him.

Mr. Penstephen spoke as little as the basilisk. He heard M. Quarantier out. He did not speak, indeed, for some moments after M. Quarantier had told what he had to tell, but this does not mean till after M. Quarantier had finished speaking. M. Quarantier did not seem able to finish speaking. He could have stopped excusing himself if his guest would only interrupt him. He heard himself going over the ground again and again. He did not speak for himself, Monsieur would see. He was, Monsieur knew, the servant of the company owning the hotel. He was helpless. Madame la comtesse — the Countess of Harbington, a great English lady with estates he understood in the islands of Ireland and Wight (Monsieur doubtless would know) — came every year. But every single year. It would not do to offend — but would not do. These great ladies. Monsieur knew. He, the hotel manager, was by example without prejudices. One arrived, one stayed, one paid one's bill. One — the hotel now — asked no questions. Where would a hotel be asking questions? Ah, he should think so, there were whom one could not receive. Oh, by example. But these one knew at a glance. They asked the best rooms, too, these sometimes; so money was nothing to go by. But Monsieur, Madame, and the little ones, so distinguished, so well placed, so amiable. All that there was of most desirable. He would only ask Monsieur to think of him as one who performed a duty — a duty most unreasonable, most uncalled for, against his inclination, his will.

"For me I ask no better patrons. But what can I, me? I throw myself upon the goodness, the generosity, the kind discretion of Monsieur . . ."

Still Mr. Penstephen did not speak. A calm, attentive eye rested on the scraper. He seemed, indeed, to be listening with his eyes. M. Quarantier, generally so bland, so complacent, felt as if he were being slowly taken to pieces.

It was then that he made his mistake. Constrained to go on speaking, constrained by Mr. Penstephen's very silence, he was unwise enough to recommend another hotel.

"In this town?"

In the rue So-and-So. Monsieur would find it very comfortable. When the hotel was full they often sent on their patrons there. If Monsieur would permit, a note very express should be sent round —

The storm broke. The rest was another sort of silence altogether — the silence in which the family left the next morning. Mr. Penstephen never 'set foot' again in Brussels. Mrs. Penstephen, more forgiving, perhaps, more understanding certainly, did in after years; but not till enough water had flowed under the bridges to wash to faintness the recollection of her tears and her humiliation.

The frown gradually left Mr. Penstephen's face. David did not observe this, but he was conscious of a lightening or a brightening generally. It was as when a lamp which has been burning, but burning dully, is turned up. Betsy became more cheerful. She talked to the children and might have been supposed to be inviting some one whose face did not at once change to be of good cheer. She painted the joys of nice lodgings after hotels — they were going to lodgings; the teas you could have with the help of an ætna; real English tea which you made yourself; pots of jam; bought cakes — none of your hotel pastry. No foreign hotel understood tea. Oh, yes, you could have tea — T. H. E. — such a way to spell it! No wonder it did n't taste right! — but when you had tried it a time or two you always fell back upon coffee, which she granted you they could make. That showed pretty well what their tea was like. David was just to think. You brought the water in the ætna up to a boil, put your tea in the teapot (having warmed that), poured in the boiling water which went in with oh, such a gurgle; let stand for a minute or two, and there you were. Betsy thought the sound of water being poured into a tea-

pot (earthenware for choice — or, of course, silver, but never 'metal' nor anything like that) from, if possible, a black kitchen kettle, polished but with just a belt of soot on it, the most musical sound in the world.

"I know it," said David. "It's right down in the teapot's stomach."

"Say heart, dear."

It was Mrs. Penstephen. She was listening, then? There was a smile on her lips as she spoke.

"Have teapots hearts?" asked David.

"Have little boys stomachs!" said Betsy. "And nice bread-and-butter cut from the loaf. To be sure that's tar-teens, but tar-teens always did seem to me to go better with coffee, and it's tea we're talking about. I'll make such tea in the lodgings! You'll all be glad to be done with hotels for a little. I'll make such tea."

"You make me want to arrive," said David's mother. "No, we don't get tea like yours, Betsy, in hotels."

"It's all the boil of the water," said Betsy.

She had diverted her mistress's thoughts from what occupied them, and that was what she wanted.

The talk of the tea, moreover, had made them all hungry, and it was really nearly time for luncheon — quite nearly enough, anyway, after their early start, to make them all welcome the thought of it. Mr. Penstephen got down the square box, and its cover was loosened just sufficiently to allow the lid to be raised. Betsy became an upright pillar box at once, and having deposited Georgina upon the seat by her mother, helped to make ready. The cold chicken which she had been out to buy the night before was ready carved. The pulling of a pink riband released wings, slices of the breast, thigh bones, drumsticks. There were buttered rolls; pinches of salt in paper. There was a bottle of wine for the elders (Betsy bidden to share it), a bottle of milk for the children. There were little tartlets — a sponge cake, or the Belgian equivalent of a sponge cake, for Georgina — and there were some grapes. No restaurant cars

then, no organised system of luncheon baskets. The tray of the holland-covered box represented what had not then been invented.

Everybody felt better for having eaten — even Mrs. Penstephen. Betsy knew. Betsy was wonderful. Her bosom was a haven of shelter and comfort for more than the heads of children. In the spirit her mistress's head had lain there and been pressed there often and often to the binding-up of the bruised heart. Once it had actually been held there, and neither ever forgot. That marked a crisis.

Mrs. Penstephen, watching her as she cleaned up and tidied and put away, thought of that now. Her movements were extraordinarily deft. How neatly everything fitted back into its place. She never seemed to hurry and yet was so quick. There, all was stowed away again. No fear that the lid would not close down under, or rather over, Betsy's skilful packing. Now she was turning the key in the lock; now readjusting the holland cover; now with a strong hoist swinging the box — which held other things below the tray and was heavy — up into the rack again; and now, all signs of the recent meal removed, perching Georgina again on to the place where her lap would have been if she had had a lap, and settling down once more as the children's nurse.

She caught her mistress's eye fixed upon her and smiled.

"I should n't be surprised but what we did n't some of us drop off before very long."

Georgina dropped first — but not off her perch. David next, his head against his mother's warm sealskin. Then Mr. Penstephen in his corner, his long legs stretched out under his rug. But neither Betsy slept, her arms clasped round the sleeping Georgina, nor Mrs. Penstephen, who took David's hand into her muff.

"Betsy, it was dreadful."

The words came of the memory and the meeting of the eyes.

"Oh, 'm, don't think of it. And we shall be so much

'appier in lodgings. I believe myself we always should be. Hotels are all very well, but there's the people and one thing and the other, and I'm sure, though trouble 's saved for you, what with the housekeeping done for you, and the service and so on, I don't in me own mind privately think — not meself, that is — that it makes up for not having a place of your own, so to speak. Lodgings, now, or — how would it be — a nice — well, a nice furnished house?"

"I've thought of that. I've often thought of that. But again there would be difficulties. It might not be every one who would care to let to us."

"Show such your banker's reference, 'm. Let 'em see the colour of money. One gold-piece is as good as another all the world over."

"Our gold-pieces don't seem to have counted for much where we've come from to-day," said Mrs. Penstephen.

"Ah, hotels," said Betsy. "People — 'erded up like."

"Not much herding. She had her own suite of rooms, I'm told. No, there would be difficulties."

"Abroad, do you think, 'm? Or, come to that, at home. London. Think how big it is. Why, you can get lost in it. There's whole districts. Beautiful houses where nobody lives that you and the Master'd be likely to know. Big houses, too. With gardens. Or there's small country places."

"The country would n't do. The country would be quite out of the question. The country — just think."

Betsy just thought.

People calling and not calling. True. Difficult to say which would be worse. No, the country, she supposed, would not do.

But London — some nice unfashionable quarter. Why, in London, even in good neighbourhoods, you did n't know the name sometimes of people who lived next door to you, and as to people in the next street — why, you did n't know them so much as by sight.

But Mrs. Penstephen shook her head. Dreams! Dreams!

Dreams were not for her. It was no good thinking of London. It could n't be England at all.

David stirred in his sleep. She settled his head more comfortably against her sealskin. Betsy, leaning forward without dislodging Georgina, pulled the rug up about her and the slumbering boy.

Neither spoke for a few minutes after that. The train swung on with its even unevenness. Outside the telegraph wires rose and dipped unheeded.

Betsy said, "Would n't you try to sleep, 'm, a little? You 've hours to make up. Let me have Master David here by me. He 'd be off again in a minute."

But Mrs. Penstephen was not sleepy. She had even slept in the night, she said. It was poor Betsy who had the hours to make up. She must have spent one half of the night packing, and the other half —

"There can't have been much other half. It must have been time to get up almost as soon as you got to bed."

"Oh, bless you, 'm, I don't mind. Went to me heart, though, to wake Master David. That boy 'll always have one comfort through life. He 'll be able to sleep away *his* troubles. There 's an endowment for anybody. There 's a — what shall I call it? — equipment. That 's it. As good as a armour. Like taking a refuge about with you. Something to creep into and lie snug in till the storm 's past."

Mrs. Penstephen looked at her sleeping son. The shadow had not fallen upon him yet, or if it had, he could not be conscious of it. But it must fall upon him. Let him sleep. He would need equipment; armours, refuges.

Betsy guessed what her mistress was thinking. It sent her own thoughts back to the events of the last twenty-four hours.

"The hotel behaved disgraceful," she said suddenly. "I 'd like to have given them me mind — *in* pieces. All of them. The manager should have been ashamed. Such a way to treat people. He should have known better."

"He could n't help himself," said Mrs. Penstephen. "I

think he was really distressed. I did n't see him. But I am quite sure."

"She, then," said Betsy. "She could help herself. So onchristian. I'd 've saved the pieces of me mind for her. I'd 've let her have them. Taking upon herself to dictate. And her with rouge on her cheeks — as I saw myself with me own eyes. Two ladies' maids, too, if you please. One to do one cheek and one to do the other, I suppose."

"Betsy!" said Mrs. Penstephen.

"Yes, 'm, disrespectful I know. I'm forgetting meself, I dare say, but it makes me blood boil. Lady, indeed! Although with maids and seckertry and companion! The companion looked a poor put-upon thing, I can tell you — for all she said 'Dear' to her ladyship as they got out of the carriage. Some poor relation, no doubt."

"Betsy," said Mrs. Penstephen. "Betsy, you must n't. I can't allow you."

"No, 'm, I know," said Betsy.

She was silent for a moment or two.

"Clergy I could understand," she said then. "Might think it their duty — even if mistaken. But for her to sit up in judgment, just because she happens to have a handle to her name (though only, I suppose, through her husband) and a suite of apartments to keep it in, makes me ill. Yes, 'm, when I think of it you must let me forget meself."

Mrs. Penstephen smiled.

"We must n't be uncharitable," she said. "She was right, perhaps, — right from her point of view, I mean."

"Did we contaminate the air, 'm?" Betsy always associated herself with the family. "Did we poison it so that people in private suites even could n't trust themselves to breathe it? We might have been criminals. We might have been dangerous characters. We might have been infectious. Oh, no, 'm, I have n't common patience."

So Betsy argued and yet Betsy deplored. She would fight tooth and nail, but no one deplored more than Betsy.

CHAPTER III

Frau Finkel's apartments happily were vacant. Mr. Penstephen had telegraphed, but there had been no time for an answer, and the family arrived at the house in Heinrich-Strasse uncertain whether they could be taken in or whether they must seek other lodging. Frau Finkel received them with open arms. She had their old rooms for them. Aired? They had only ceased to be occupied the week before — a Russian family, very highly placed; the beds had been before the fire all day. The stoves were lighted, the rooms warm, everything ready. And was this the young Herr David? So grown. So tall. So like his noble father. And this the baby of two years ago? So wonder-beautiful. So like her gracious mother (which Georgina was n't particularly). And Fräulein Betsee. Ach's and So's and adverbs and adjectives and pent-up verbs filled the passage.

Mr. Penstephen said, "Yes, yes, yes," in a tone of good-natured impatience.

But the good woman's welcome was grateful to every one. Smiling servants relieved arms and hands of rugs and baggage. David yielded up The Shawl and the bundle of toys to some one called Anna, and some one else called Gretchen relieved Betsy of the holland-covered box. Frau Finkel, talking still and carrying both the dressing-cases, led the way up.

High rooms, painted ceilings, china stoves: these David's dominant impressions. He remembered these things vaguely from his last visit, but saw them now freshly. The woodwork which he did not notice was painted to resemble other wood — perhaps even itself. There were huge looking-glasses. The furniture, which was old and rather handsome, was upholstered in faded brocade. There were loose

covers over this on some of the chairs. David recognised the chair which he had broken. It was still broken. He pointed it out to his mother.

"Do you remember that, darling?"

"I knocked it down and a piece came off. Father *said* I was n't to tip up my chair because it would fall if I did, and I just wanted to see, and I tipped it once just the least little bit further and it did. Of course I did n't mean to — at least I did n't mean it to."

"Your father was right, you see."

"Fathers always are, are n't they?"

"Always," said David's mother; but as Mrs. Penstephen she was n't sure.

"He had to pay for it, had n't you, Father?"

"When things are broken," said David's father, "they generally have to be paid for."

David gave his funny little laugh.

"It's the fathers that have to pay."

Mrs. Penstephen was thinking that it was sometimes the mothers. But that would not matter if it were not that it was also sometimes the children. She looked at the broken chair.

"Fancy your remembering," was what she said.

"But I remember everything," said David.

He was full of excitement. The luggage was bumping its way up to the bedrooms. He ran out of the room to see it pass. Frau Finkel stood guard over her wall-papers and her banisters, and gave voluble directions, or wrinkled her forehead when the stairs creaked under the weight of the trunks, or scratches to paint or plaster seemed imminent. The women servants giggled from time to time — when a corner was difficult to negotiate or a chandelier was in danger. Women carrying a heavy trunk always giggled, David in the course of his travels had long since observed. An awkward turn in the stairs or a moment of jeopardy was always enough to send them into laughing hysterics. One generally pushed a little too much or the other perhaps

pulled. Men porters, the 'boots' in hotels, flymen, and the like — never found weight-lifting so exhilarating. Why was it?

He asked Frau Finkel in German, and she answered him in English.

Because girls were great sillies she said. Oh, so sillies. Look at Anna now, laughing because she had nearly carried away de door-post, and Gretchen too in sympatee.

"Dey tink of deir own silliness, not of my valls, not of de chentleman's and de ladies' tronks. I tell dem vait! Vait till dey have houses of deir own if ever. Vait till dey have so much as a tronk. Den dey see. Den perhaps dey laugh on de oder site. Just sillinesses like I tell you."

Oh, that was it? David thought he rather liked sillinesses.

Anna and Gretchen were taking a momentary rest on the landing. They had not stopped laughing. Anna had blue earrings and a striped 'Garibaldi' and, as she sat on the trunk, very fat legs. Her hair was in a net. Gretchen had, chiefly, a broad face with little screwed-up eyes set very far apart, and a mouth with small white teeth in it. She had some pins and a needle or two — one of the needles threaded — stuck into the bosom of her dress. Her hair, of which she seemed to have a great quantity, was done in plaits bound closely round her head.

"Na — now," said Frau Finkel, speaking to the girls in English for the benefit it is to be supposed of David, "Na— now ve finish. No more restings. No more sillinesses. Forvarts!"

But as the girls lifted the trunk and became conscious once more of the strain on their muscles they had to laugh.

David clapped his hands, hopped on one leg, and looked at Frau Finkel.

"Anna, vill you attention! I am ashamed of you. Such laughings not seemly. De young chentleman tink I have noting but sillies for servants. Gretchen, you drop de ent if you pay not carefulness. And vearing still your timble!

Vas ever! Vy dee n't you take it off, foolish? How can you hold tight mit a timble on de finger. Na — now, vonce more again, attention!"

The bumping proceeded. To David's delight Anna, who mounted the stairs backwards, sat suddenly. Even Betsy, who came out of one of the bedrooms at that moment, had to laugh.

"We like lodgings better than hotels, don't we, Master David?"

"I should think we did," said David.

Frau Finkel said, "Please excuse, Fräulein Betsee."

"Oh, we'll excuse," said Betsy.

So they arrived cheerfully. They slept that night. Oh, how they all slept — even Mrs. Penstephen who had not thought to sleep. Betsy, awake betimes, did not call the children, and saw too that her mistress was not called. Mrs. Penstephen should have slept the clock round if Betsy had had her way.

And now things began to happen in German instead of Belgian-French. The people were different, the dogs were different, the wares in the shops. Everything smelled different. In the grocer's shop where some of the provisions were bought, there was the most delicious smell that David had ever smelt. It was compounded of many things, but sugar-candy, dried figs, and coffee were its most recognisable ingredients. The molasses and the sugar-cane of the boys' books, which became part of his life later on, always made him think of the smell of this shop. He carried, indeed, a recollection of it through the length of his days. It took its place amongst the nice smells which he stored in his mind. Everything had its smell for David's young nostrils: the faces of Georgina's wax dolls; the tin ducks with the shining metallic colours which he 'swam' in his bath and which followed a magnet; his leaden soldiers; his tops; his box of paints; doll's-house furniture, the little wooden chests-of-drawers particularly; books, their bind-

ings — a gluey smell; and many things which were n't supposed to have a smell at all, such as marbles and glass and china. Natural, then, that for David, different countries should have their distinguishing smells — different towns even. The smell of Brussels, for instance, was quite different from that of Antwerp, but both were Belgian, and quite different from French. Cookery entered into the smells of all towns. David knew Swiss smells (there were not many, somehow) from Italian. Homburg he told Betsy smelt German — but not a bit like Cologne.

To Betsy the smells of one place were pretty much like those of another. Some, to be sure, worse than others. Homburg, it was true, was wholly agreeable.

"I like England meself," she said — "for choice and for preference — where there's none."

David would have found some.

"None to speak of," she said. "There's right and there's proper smells, of course. Vinegar, now. I've noticed that, perhaps in the street passing an oyster stall. And maybe oranges at the play. And if it's coffee you want, why, they roast that too in England. There's windows I could take you past as'd make your mouth water. And the flowers I'm sure smell lovely. It is n't only abroad, Master David, that there's coffee and flowers. Covent Garden, now. I've been there. Nothing to equal it. And a shop in the Strand where the berries are roasted and ground for the customer. What I mean to say, in England there's no drains."

Oh, it was n't only drains, David said.

"It's just the smells of places."

"Be rights," said Betsy, "places did n't ought to have none."

"Well, they have," said David.

The smell of the delicious grocer's might stand to him for the smell of Homburg.

"When we was here before," said Betsy, who had a way of changing the subject when any particular point seemed to her to have been discussed long enough, or perhaps

when she could not think of anything more to say regarding it, "there was the Tables. It was the summer and the place full of grand folks. There was one lady I remember as they said had gambled away a whole street — the Chrysalis-Strass if I remember right. There was royalties here too. H.R.H.'s of all sorts. You would n't hardly remember."

"I wish you would n't think I did n't remember things, Betsy. You always do. And I do remember. I remember the taste of the black bread — that was here. I remember the rusks and the goat's milk and feeding the deer. They put their noses through railings with bark on them, and breathed quite hot on your hand when you gave them grass. Sniffing it, you know. Then they turned their tongues round it."

He did appear to remember.

"Bless the boy," said Betsy.

Georgina now said that she remembered.

"Oh, come, come," said Betsy.

Georgina could n't. David knew that. She had only been a baby. Goodness, he remembered longer ago than Homburg. He believed he remembered the smell of warm india-rubber which must have dated from the bottle days; but perhaps in that he was remembering through and for Georgina.

Long words, gutturals, in the ears; attempts and achievements on the lips. David's German was said to be coming back to him.

"Get 'em a German nursery-maid," counselled Mr. Penstephen. "Some one to help Betsy and talk German to them. Some one who only knows a few words of English."

So the family was to stay on at Homburg. Mrs. Penstephen consulted Betsy and then consulted Frau Finkel. Frau Finkel knew of no one just then. A fortnight ago and she could have laid her hand upon the very person for them.

"Ach, vat a pity. Dere vas Carlotta Meinz — de very ting for you. So goot vid children. De daughter of de man dat vinds de clocks. Tree months she vant a situvation. A lady engages her de veek before last. Dat is all, just de veek before last. But I look about. I enkvire for you. I ask de maids. Dey may know."

A young girl, Mrs. Penstephen thought. About seventeen or eighteen. Younger even if she was steady. Some one who would play with the children.

"I know joost vat you vant. To play mit de children in Chairman."

"Just so."

"And dey learn de habit of speaking vidout knowing dey learn. Alvays vid games. She should be a little above, den. A little educated more. Better perhaps I do not ask de maids."

"Not a nursery governess," said Mrs. Penstephen. "The children are hardly old enough for that."

"Na — no, betvixt and betveen. I speak to my sister-in-law. She teaches a school. Very likely she know some von. I go to her dis efening."

"Well, not any one too superior."

"No, no, Madame. But just of nice peoples and a goot bringing-up. Leave it to me. Perhaps I find you some one even petter dan Carlotta Meinz."

She found Katinka Heinz.

Katinka Heinz was of nice peoples and a good bringing-up, the daughter of the grocer (no less) of the shop with the delightful smell. Katinka, who got her odd name from her mother, who had not been German, and many other foreignesses also, was not destined for service, but, for the advantage which it would be to her to be with a distinguished English family, her father was ready to allow her (and she most anxious to be allowed) to take the place which Mrs. Penstephen wanted to fill.

Mrs. Penstephen, oddly, Frau Finkel thought, seemed to demur. She had thought of a nursery-maid — not some

one in the position of Katinka Heinz. Frau Finkel knew the moderate terms which she had proposed to offer.

Dat, Frau Finkel said, was understood. It was de vish of Katinka to take de place. She vished to be treated, moreover, just like as if she was de oder. Not like a governess at all. She was not a governess. She was just de children's maid under Fräulein Betsee. Katinka loved children. She had seen already dese at her fader's shop, and asked nothing better dan to be allowed to come.

Still Mrs. Penstephen demurred.

"Oh, Madame, be advise. Even better dan Carlotta Meinz, and dat was not likely. I know Katinka's fader all my life — so respected. Belief me, you can trust de children wid her mit an easy mind. I make myself surety of it."

"Oh, it is n't that," said Mrs. Penstephen.

"And a good accent," said Frau Finkel; "so important, like I always say, in learning a lankvidge. I had myself de advantage of my moder's broder who married an Enklish voman. Dat 's how I spik so easy. Enklish is kvite natcherl to me."

Mr. Penstephen was out. So, at the moment, was even Betsy. There was no one to consult.

"If you would perhaps see Katinka —"

"Oh, yes, I would see her."

"I send her up," said Frau Finkel.

Katinka it seemed was below. Frau Finkel was at the door before Mrs. Penstephen had made up her mind what to answer. Almost at once the two could be heard ascending, Frau Finkel talking all the way.

"Dis is de young person. Dis is Katinka Heinz who has come about de gracious lady's situvation."

The blushing Katinka made her obeisance.

"Better now I leave you," said Frau Finkel. "And you speak up, Katinka, and answer all vat de lady asks you."

Katinka turned her smiling blush toward her. Frau Finkel, admonishing with her eyelids, withdrew.

The lady did not seem to have much to ask. What she appeared to want to know chiefly was whether Katinka was quite certain that she wanted to come to her.

Katinka was quite certain, more certain than ever since she had seen the gracious lady face to face.

"Tell me why you want to come," said Mrs. Penstephen, looking at her kindly, but still with perplexity on her forehead and in her eyes. She spoke in German.

"I love children," said Katinka in the same language. "I have always loved to be with them. I have little brothers and sisters, but they are little no longer. We are four. I am seventeen and a half already — and the youngest is twelve. Not, Madame will see, little any more. Not to need me if the lady will understand."

"But my children won't need you in that sense," said Mrs. Penstephen, still looking at her, as Katinka saw, very kindly. "They have their old nurse."

"That is true. It would be my hope to make them like me too. I am happy with children. I have the lucky way with them. It is thus happy for me also."

Mrs. Penstephen considered. She continued to look at Katinka. Katinka thought she had the kindest face she had ever seen, and wondered why it was also one of the saddest. This, inside Katinka; Katinka outside showed fluttering eyelids and a colour which came and went — which came again, indeed, each time almost before it had quite gone.

"I am indeed good with children," she said out of the silence and speaking for sheer shyness. "There are some like that. They will tell you at home. Or Frau Finkel. She will speak for me."

"You don't need any one to speak for you," said Mrs. Penstephen. "You do that for yourself — better than it could be done for you."

"Oh, have I said too much? Pardon. I did not mean to praise myself. I — I am so anxious."

Mrs. Penstephen laid a hand on Katinka's arm.

"My child, you have n't praised yourself. You have n't

said a word too much. It would have been the same if you had n't spoken. I meant — oh, it does n't matter what I meant, does it? — since it's quite plain, as far as that goes, that I am pleased with you, Katinka."

"Oh, gracious lady. You engage me."

Katinka trembled with excitement. She looked younger even than her seventeen years — 'and a half already' — at that moment. She was very pretty, with blue eyes and a very fair skin, and hair as abundant as that of the laughing Gretchen, but richer in colour and finer in texture. A daughter of whom a parent would be proud.

Mrs. Penstephen was beginning to shake her head when Katinka's eyes filled with sudden tears. She engaged her.

CHAPTER IV

KATINKA came every morning at half past seven and left every evening when the children were in bed. Betsy, at first just the least little bit antagonistic to her, — or perhaps rather to the idea of her than to Katinka herself, — was not of a jealous disposition, so she bore no malice, and when she grew accustomed to the idea of Katinka she soon accepted Katinka. She would have been obliged to admit anyway that Katinka was a success.

It had been a disappointment to Katinka that she was not to sleep at her employer's. Mrs. Penstephen, when she had spoken to Frau Finkel about a nursery-maid, had certainly meant one who should sleep in, but with Katinka she had settled that she should come by the day. Katinka's home was so near that the arrangement naturally suggested itself.

The plan certainly answered admirably. Katinka was never late in the morning. Half past seven, or even a little before that, saw her at the door of the room known as the nursery.

"Hallo, Katinka," from David.

"Hallo, Katinka," from Georgina the echo.

"But in German," said Katinka, and reminded them every morning that she was not allowed to speak English.

Betsy always laughed.

"You'll be turning them into little foreigners," she said.

"Dis is vat I am here for," said Katinka, also laughing. She was allowed to speak English to Betsy.

She was, indeed, as she had said, good with children. Betsy was wonderful, but Katinka was wonderful in another way. Her appeal was always to the imagination.

She cast a spell over the most ordinary things so that a walk became as great an adventure as the longest journey David had ever taken; and the trivial round was illumined and glorified. From a walk she would bring back fir cones which she would sow with grass seed, and, lo, presently miniature forests on miniature mountain peaks. She showed the children how to plant mustard and cress upon flannel; and how a beautiful palm-like plant would spring from a mere carrot-top in a saucer of water. Any one could have done this. But the process of enchantment — it took a Katinka for that. The saucer was a lake, the carrot-top an island in the middle of it. Inhabitants were invented to dwell under the shade of its one palm-like tree. Katinka knew the way; had the secret; understood or remembered the child-mind.

When it was stormy they would n't be able to get away from the island, David would say.

The lake was n't often stormy, she would answer. It was quite clear. It was white like the bottom of a beautiful swimming-bath. They did swim in it sometimes.

They took off their clothes under the tree, said David.

Yes, and left some one to look after them for fear they should be stolen. And they always put one toe into the water before they stepped in, to see if it was warm.

And if it was n't warm, what did they do?

The brave ones still went in. They splashed about and said, 'Oh, you don't know how delicious it is to-day.' But the other ones knew they were only pretending.

What did they do?

Put their clothes on again and waited for another day.

"I should have gone in."

Betsy would stand sometimes looking on.

"*I* don't understand your gibberish," she would say to Katinka. "What's it all about?"

David would explain.

"Well, the carrot-top's very pretty, that I will say, and it's marvellous to me what all those leaves grow out of,

considering that it's decapitated, so to speak, and no soil to nourish it either. The mustard and cress, of course, is English."

"You have not de carrot in Enkland, no?"

"Oh, bless you, we've carrots," said Betsy, "and I dare say they'd grow in an English saucer. But there would n't be these fairy tales about them."

"You have not fairies in Enkland, no?"

"No," said Betsy.

There was the exact difference in wonderfulness.

Betsy was wonderful, but she had no fairies. Katinka was wonderful and had.

She told the children about them. Even Georgina seemed to understand. David stood enthralled at Katinka's knee.

Or she would teach them games. There was Lotto. Betsy would play for Georgina. Or she would dress dolls — not a bit like just dressing dolls (which David affected to despise, but could not help being interested in); or she would fold some paper — newspaper would do — into a long cone-shaped wedge, and giving it cuts on alternate sides with the nursery scissors, would transform it into hanging net-like baskets. With coloured paper she said you could make, thus, 'ornaments' for the looking-glasses, or decorations for the stoves. She was never at a loss. She could transform a wet day when they could n't go out into something better than a fine one. She it was who introduced David to the delights of transfer pictures. That was the day of the Great Rain when it never stopped pouring from morning till night.

Katinka said in English "I know vat ve do," and put on her hat and her cloak and borrowed Betsy's goloshes, and went out mysteriously into the deluge with some *kreuzers* and her big umbrella. She came back to the expectant children in ten minutes or so, saying, "My vord but it vas vet," and carrying something wrapped up in paper. Something was itself paper — paper all over little pictures.

Decalcomanie, as nearly as David could arrive at what she called them!

"You vait," she said. "You vill see. You put dem on books or on china or on glass — on anyting dat you vant."

None of Georgina's came off whole. David tore most of his or spoilt them by lifting up a corner to see how they were getting on, — as the boiling of a pot is delayed by lifting its cover, — but breathless interest filled the nursery. That was a wet day redeemed.

Or she amused them all with her photograph album. This was her father in his best coat, and that was her mother who was dead. Here were her paternal and maternal grandparents. Yes, funny the clothes of their day so long ago already. The stern old woman in the cap was her father's mother who yet lived and whom they all visited from time to time, never forgetting to take her a present of a particular sausage which she was very fond of and which was not to be obtained so good at Frankfort where she lived. These were Katinka's aunts — Tante Maria with the edging of forget-me-nots round the photograph, and Tante Wilhelmina with the lace shawl.

Mrs. Penstephen, it chanced, came in while the album was being shown. She looked over the blushing, happy Katinka's shoulder, while David of his knowledge told her eagerly who every one was.

"The ugly one is Katinka's Aunt Wilhelmina," he finished.

Of nice peoples and good bringing-up, plainly. Can it have been because this was so unmistakably so, that, as Mrs. Penstephen went back to the sitting-room, her face wore the anxious look with which those who knew and loved it best were familiar? Nothing but contentment, however, in the faces round the nursery lamp.

Or Katinka would sing to them, *Ihr Kinderlein kommet*, and *Ich hat' einen Kamaraden, Keinen bessern finds du nicht*, and *Im Rosen Garten*, and *Der Winter ist kommen*. David presently could sing some of these. He could sing *Der*

Tannerbaum through; and join in the *Juvivalara* chorus of the haunting *Wanderlied.* He would pipe to himself by the hour — laying up for himself, if he could have known it, by weaving the melodies upon which they were to string themselves, memories by the dozen. In after years he never heard the *Tannerbaum* without recalling not Katinka only, but by reason of the atmosphere with which she was surrounded and which spread itself over the German town, and all that it held, many things with which it would have been difficult to connect her even indirectly.

Presently Mrs. Penstephen would come in to hear the singing. By degrees peace seemed to be stealing over her and banishing the look of apprehension from her face. She would take Georgina on her lap, sometimes even David, and would join in. Then must the scene presented have looked more domestic than ever. Betsy by the stove working; Katinka holding the tune when the other voices wavered; his mother and Georgina, a Madonna and Child; David often tried to recall the scene completely. Sometimes Mr. Penstephen would look in for a few minutes. He fitted into the picture too, and yet he was a little bit disturbing. Betsy and Katinka, rising to their feet, had to be told to sit down. They rose equally, of course, for Mrs. Penstephen when she came in; but Katinka, when it was Mr. Penstephen, had generally to be told more than once before she could be prevailed upon to resume her seat, while from Mrs. Penstephen the merest gesture sufficed.

"Not hymns, are they?" he had said the first time.

David's mother had shaken her head.

Der Tannerbaum? Wanderlied? Der Winter? Ich hat' einen Kamaraden?

Not those. The *Kinderlein* one.

"Let them alone, John."

The *Kinderlein* one was dangerously like a hymn. It was also Mrs. Penstephen's favourite.

Mr. Penstephen let them alone.

"Now the Mill song," David's mother would say.

This was a new one sung to an accompaniment of tissue paper (though, as in the case of the material for the network baskets, even newspaper would do!), rubbed slowly round and round on the nursery table to imitate the sound of water churned by a wheel. Very popular the Mill with David and little Georgina, who churned and churned as they sang.

"It's supposed to be water, Father. Did you guess?"

Father had guessed. But he had also made Katinka shy. The accompaniment, which had been so pretty before, was perhaps silly? It was n't silly, of course, really. It was one of Katinka's wonderfulnesses. On the whole, the singing went better, and the picture must consequently have been more in key (like the singing) when Mr. Penstephen did not come in.

David was perhaps too young to notice that, though *Ihr Kinderlein kommet* was undoubtedly his mother's favourite, she never asked for it when his father was there.

Und seh't was in dieser hochheiliger Nacht
Der Vater im Himmel für . . .

Betsy noticed, we may be sure. But then Betsy, who understood not one word of German, had understood only too well — had been the only one except her mistress to understand — the allusion to hymns. *Ihr Kinderlein kommet*, albeit 'as good as Greek' to her, became her favourite also. '*Der Vater im Himmel*' may have conveyed its meaning to her and it is probable that she recognised the word 'Bethlehem' as it came. Betsy, unlike her incomprehensible master, dearly dearly dearly liked a hymn.

Nothing had been said to Katinka. It had been thought, perhaps, that the point — religion — would just not arise. It did not directly. She was there to play with them (in German), not to teach them. Indirectly, of course, it did arise many times. But the children were too young to know that anything was lacking. Missing nothing, they did

not know that something was withheld. Betsy, who was not allowed to teach them prayers, mentioned them, we may be sure, in her own.

No. Mr. Penstephen might make his mind easy; the songs were not hymns (with the possible exception of the *Kinderlein* one); but they took the place of hymns in the strangely regulated family. David all his life looked back to the songs, as others look back to 'Gentle Jesu, meek and mild,' or 'Now the day is over,' or the 'Promised Land,' and with kindred or perhaps the very same feelings. *Ihr Kinderlein* would always be sacred to him, but so would *Wanderlied*, even with its jubilant exulting rousing chorus — a very Onward-Christian-Soldiers of a chorus! — and of course *Ich hat' einen Kamaraden.*

"Don't you wish you could sing them, Betsy?"

"Ah, I can listen. Perhaps that's better."

That was something David admitted, but it could n't be the same as singing them. Why did n't Betsy join in? Georgina did, though she could n't manage the words. Even he, David, did n't understand all of them, though of course he could say them.

"Me sing German?" said Betsy.

"I teach you," said Katinka.

"Thank you," said Betsy, "English is good enough for me. There's songs in that, though I dare say you won't believe me."

"Betsy can sing 'Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green.'"

"And 'Polly put the kettle on.'"

"All Pollies!" said Katinka.

"A popular name in my country," said Betsy. "Oh, there's songs there right enough. Sims Reeves, I've heard him. There's 'Tom Bowling' if you want a good cry, and 'Annabel Lee,' and 'The 'eart bowed down,' and 'When other lips.' And there's 'The Perfect Cure' if you want to laugh, and 'I'm ninety-five, I'm ninety-five, and to keep

single I'll contrive' — Oh, all the songs are n't German, Katinka, my dear, and don't you think it."

"Gote safe de Qveen," said Katinka, to show that she knew.

"Ah, there I agree with you," said Betsy.

Are we spending too much time in a nursery? The gentle reader will bear with us. His own early days were passed there and made him, or perhaps only shewed him to have been then, what he is to-day. Many things had their beginning, or began to find their expression or their outlet in the room called the nursery at Frau Finkel's house that winter. For David in later years events, happenings, beginnings, endings were apt to date from that morning when he was taken whimpering from his warm bed in Brussels, to prepare for the journey which was to land him in Homburg and bring the blushing Katinka's influence to bear upon his life.

CHAPTER V

THERE were other diversions besides singings and transfer pictures and growings of plants on such impossible things as flannel or in saucers. There were paintings of pictures with paints from Katinka's own paint box, which she brought round to supplement those of the children, which lacked the usual percentage of the little flat bricks of colour. Some of the bricks in Katinka's box were worn through to a hole, notably the crimson lake which was a mere rim, and the gamboge which shewed the wood of the box underneath most perceptibly; but till the children used them not any of them were stained to any appreciable degree with colours which were not their own. Katinka conscientiously used the little saucers provided for mixing, and washed and wiped her brushes continually. She liked to paint flowers: roses, convolvuluses, forget-me-nots. David drew and painted trains. It would be difficult to say what Georgina drew or painted. Betsy got through a great deal of work when it was painting.

There was making paste. This was called making paste, but the paste was prepared before it was given to the children to play with — flour and water kneaded to the consistency of a firm dry dough. With the substance thus produced, exercises, if you please, in the plastic art! They made and unmade and remade things: snakes (very popular); the human form (very difficult — Katinka's models the only ones recognisable!); sausages (popular too); animals — well, pigs anyway; ropes (indistinguishable from snakes); plaits (Katinka); and loaves — English loaves particularly, with an elbow-mark made with the finger on top. Lastly generally the loaves, by which time, however clean the hands to start with, the paste was nearly black. The loaves were then baked on the stove and smelt de-

licious. The disappointment came always when, delicious as they smelt, they might not be eaten.

"Eat them! Well, I never, nor nobody else, I should think, in their senses. After messing them all over the table and on the window-sill, to say nothing of how many times they've been on the floor. Black as me hat the nasty stuff was last time I looked at it."

David pointed out that it was not black now that it was baked, and that you could eat black bread anyway, could n't you, Katinka?

"You won't eat this black bread, Master David. And here's Miss Georgina baked one of the worms — well, snakes, then. Fancy eating a snake even if it was clean. And I'm bound to say, what with the knots and things, it still looks to me more like a worm. No, no, now it's done with we'll throw this all out for the birds."

Invariable end of their masterpieces! There were serious drawbacks, it will be seen, to the beguiling diversion of paste-making. The pastime fell perhaps under too many heads: if it was cooking, the end should surely have been the table; if modelling, the efforts should surely have been preserved — treated, by courtesy at least, as works of art, and so reputedly imperishable. A loaf, or, Model of a Loaf; a fancy biscuit, or, Model of a Snake Recumbent.

Betsy did not get through so much work when the diversion was paste-making.

There was Acting. David could sometimes recapture the thrill of these early actings. Katinka was perhaps at her most wonderful when it was acting. She was stage-manager, playwright, scene-painter, scene-shifter, prompter, wardrobe-keeper, dresser, leading lady, juvenile, first old man, first old woman, singing chambermaid, voice without, crowd 'off,' and innumerable other things of which (as of these) David was not even to know the names till much later in his life. The Shawl, fastened by Katinka's ingenuity to David could never remember afterwards what, was the curtain. The rugs disposed over footstools and chairs

were rocks, or mossy banks, or forest glades as the case might be. Or, with paper doors and windows pinned on to them, they were Baronial Halls or Cottage Exteriors, or Fronts of Palaces. Nothing baffled Katinka. If she had ever heard of a Transformation Scene she would have contrived to produce one. The plays were all in English in the interests of Betsy, the audience (who had to pay for her seat, as had also Mrs. Penstephen when she came to the performances, and even Frau Finkel when she came — which was once. Only Anna and Gretchen were on the free list). The stage-directions were in German and so supposed to be inaudible.

"Ach, who are dese that come into dis lonely place? Better I visdraw into de house and vatch." Exit Katinka. "Now," in rapid German whispers, "you go on with Miss Georgina by the hand and say" (breaking into English), "Ah, vat a lovely place. I so tired am. And also as vell my little sister. Rest ve here a little under shade of dis tree."

Enter David leading Georgina. Words in his piping treble as above.

Katinka prompting (David repeating sentence by sentence): "But vat is dis? A house? And see. Oh, vat is dis dat I beholt? All made of chincherbread. And de vindows of barley sugar. Break ve off a piece. Eat ve."

Voice of the Witch from within: "Who is dis dat breaks my vindows, dat munches off pieces of my house? Oh, vat mischievousnesses. Vait till I come. Listen. You hear my footsteps. I approach. I draw by. I am here."

Entry of Katinka as the Witch. Howls of terror from Georgina, who has to be comforted by the audience and reassured by a sight of Katinka herself through her disguise, before the play can proceed.

And so on and so forth. Oh, the nursery in Katinka's day was an enchanted place. It was there that David knew first that when he grew up he wanted to be an actor.

And the readings. Most enthralling perhaps of all. Is it possible that he had read Captain Marryat's *Jacob Faithful* in German? *Jacob Erlich.* How else should he have known the name? It is quite certain that he was introduced to the many magics of the Brothers Grimm — in English, too, oddly enough, the book in translation being an old school prize of Katinka's and the rule of German only having been relaxed by then in the interests of poor isolated Betsy and the partly isolated Georgina. A round-eyed David at Katinka's knee. An excited David struggling to his feet sometimes; dancing round her; hardly able to contain himself. A David moved to laughter. A David moved to tears. *The Golden Bird; The Youth who could not Shiver and Shake; The Fisherman and his Wife; Hansel and Grethel* (known these before in Katinka's dramatic version and rapturously recognised); *The False Bride* (oh, Falada, Falada, most lovable of talking horses!); *The Magic Mirror* ('Mirror, Mirror on the wall, Who is most beautiful of all?'); we may envy him.

What did Katinka's accent matter as she read? —

> "Fair qveen at home, dere is none like dee,
> But over de mountains is Snow-vite free,
> Vid sefen little dvarts, who are strange to see,
> She is a tousand times fairer dan dee!"

Even Betsy was interested. Georgina, who could n't be expected to concentrate her attention upon what she imperfectly understood, generally slid to the floor in the course of a reading, but managed to amuse herself well enough, there, not to prove a serious interruption.

When one story was finished David begged for another. Georgina always joined in the begging whether she understood or not. Betsy said, "She likes the sound of the voice." Children often did, it seemed. "But are n't you tired, Katinka?" Katinka always shook her head.

"She is n't tired," said David; and truly she never was.

"*De Lankvidge of Animals.* Vould you like dat?"

David seemed uncertain that he would like that.

"*De King of de Golten Mountain.*"

Yes, that, that. No uncertainty here. His preferences gradually became apparent. He liked things with 'Golden' in them: *The Golden Bird; The Golden Castle of Stromberg; The Three Golden Hairs.* And things with numbers. Threes and sevens particularly: the Golden Hairs doubly then; *The Three Spinning Fairies; The Three White Snakes; The Three Little Men in the Wood; The Seven Ravens; The Seven Wise Men; The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids.* And things made of things: *The Coffin of Glass; The Crystal Ball.* And things with adjectives: *The Magic Fiddle; The Wonderful Travellers; The Fearless Prince.*

Sometimes bedtime came in the middle of a story. Pleadings then. Firmness under difficulties on the part of Betsy. He learnt the seduction of the 'To be Continued,' a phrase which was to be very familiar to him later on. He looked forward to the reading hour as he looked forward to nothing else in his happy shadowed young life. So unconsciously, happily, was it shadowed! Just then even to his mother it did not seem shadowed at all. In the calm and the domesticity of Frau Finkel's apartments she was beginning to forget again. Presently, of course, something would happen; something always did; but, in the meantime, peace. She found herself slipping in to listen to the readings. Readings were not new things. She used often to read to the children herself, and to their invariable pleasure. But it had fallen to Katinka to light upon the magic Grimm.

Hans Andersen she promised herself should be for her.

What was it about Grimm? Some of the stories could not be said to be quite rightly conceived. 'The Frog Prince,' for instance. Could justice — poetic justice even — be said to be satisfied in that? The little spoilt Princess, obliged by the King, her father, to keep her promise to the ugly frog, that, for rescuing her ball from the fountain, he should eat from her golden plate, drink from her cup, and sleep in

her silken bed, keeps it no better than by dashing him with all her strength against the wall of her outraged room—— when, lo, as if she had deserved reward, the frog changes into a handsome young Prince with beautiful friendly eyes, and the two live happily ever after!

Something amiss there surely. She looked at David, expecting to see him indignant or puzzled. He was for a moment. Then she saw his face light up. He jumped about in his eagerness.

"He meant her to. He meant her to. That was why — why he said sleep in her silken bed. Don't you see?"

"How do you mean, David?"

"Don't you see?" flushed, breathless. "The frog knew she would n't. He was wet and cold. He could n't sleep in a bed. He had to be dashed against a wall to be turned into a Prince, and that was the only way he could think of."

It was rather wonderful. Was Grimm or was David the more wonderful? It took a child to see what was intended for children. She abandoned her criticism. You don't criticise masters. You accept them. Thereafter she accepted Grimm as David did.

So Katinka continued to read. There were many stories to choose from. A hundred and thirty, indeed. David made her count them.

"When we've heard them all we can begin again, can't we?"

Katinka looked at Mrs. Penstephen.

"It is n't learning German."

Mrs. Penstephen smiled back at her.

"Perhaps it's as good for them," she said. After David's luminous speech she was n't sure that it was n't better than learning anything.

How did Katinka understand so well?

So the weeks passed. Even Mr. Penstephen seemed to have come to anchor. It was long since he had been content to stay so lengthy a period in any one place. He shewed

no signs of wishing to move — none, even, of restlessness. The luggage was having a holiday. One of these days the order must come, but it did not. Betsy began to put down tentative roots; said she wanted one or two little things for the rooms; was allowed to buy them. Suggested new antimacassars for the sitting-room chairs. Was allowed to make them. Saw some nice delft jars for holding flowerpots. Was allowed to get these. Jars, mark you, which would have to be left behind. That looked like staying. A case of wine which arrived was a healthy sign, too. You removed wine no more than unpackable delft jars. Nor was that all. At first the meals had come in from a neighbouring hotel — layers of covered dishes packed in deep round baize-lined wicker baskets, with a vertical gap at one side through which you might see the stacked porcelain and pewter tier upon tier, with steam coming out of the top. Quite hot and satisfactory but rather unhomely. Now Mrs. Penstephen did her own housekeeping and Frau Finkel cooked. That gave you a feeling of stability. Where there was housekeeping there was necessarily a house to keep. You did not lay in provisions that you would not have time to use, and the big *chiffonnière* in the dining-room was almost now a storeroom. All the signs were favourable.

"We never were more comfortable," she ventured to her mistress.

Mrs. Penstephen was a little superstitious and she did not answer.

"Nearly as good as a furnished house, anyway," said Betsy. She might at least say that.

It wanted a piano to make the thing secure — the clinching, final, locking, or sealing, fact of a piano. Katinka, with her successful singings and actings and paste-makings and readings, was something. The antimacassars were something. The housekeeping, the stocked *chiffonnière*, the case of wine — the case of wine especially — all something. But a piano by the month, carried, moreover, up all those

stairs, — to more creakings and jeopardisings of paint and plaster than the largest or the heaviest of the trunks was capable even of suggesting to the anxious mind of the most apprehensive of landladies, — that would have meant something, indeed, and much more than something! That would have promised weeks and more than weeks; months; three, perhaps even six. Betsy, little partial as she was to what she called comprehensively Abroad, thought she could have welcomed the prospect of as many as make a year in peaceful Homburg.

But there was no talk of a piano.

There had been one the winter they spent in Florence — and it had been a whole winter they had spent there. There had been one in Paris — a stretch of six months. There had been one at Geneva — three. A piano, in this sense, a piano of course from the shop. Quite a different thing from the pianos you found in hotels, or in lodgings, as part of the furniture. Those meant nothing. The piano to mean anything — to be a gage, or to hold a promise — must be hired.

Not a word of one.

Betsy looked about for music shops.

Found one.

"I don't know what it is about the drawing-room," she said to her mistress that evening as she brushed her hair.

"What about it?" asked Mrs. Penstephen.

"That's what I say, 'm. I don't know what it is about it. What would it be?"

"What would what be?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't understand. Is anything wrong with it? I don't see anything wrong with it."

"No, 'm — I shall bring the plait again across the top to-morrow if you'll let me. I'm sure it suits you that way best — No, 'm, not to say wrong exactly."

"It's more comfortable flat," said Mrs. Penstephen.

"The parting, 'm? Yes, I grant you, your head being so

classical. I would n't dream of touching that. But like I used to do it for you in Paris. Just the plait —"

"Well, we'll see. But the sitting-room here —"

"Yes, 'm. I don't know, I'm sure. Always looks to me a little bit bare, 'm."

"Bare! But it's full of furniture."

"Then I can't think what it would be."

She went back to the subject of hair-dressing.

"If it was n't for me, 'm, I believe you'd still be doing it the way it was worn ten years ago. And you with such beautiful hair and such a quantity, though so fine. I declare it's a shame. I don't believe you'd ever think of the fashion."

"I don't believe I should," Mrs. Penstephen said, but she smiled.

"There's a confession," said Betsy.

"But about the room —"

"I shall just do it the new way and see if the Master notices."

"He won't like it."

"He won't notice. Besides it is n't new really — because of Paris, as you remember. Though, to be sure, I must try it just a little different — nothing that you'd notice yourself even, but just a little more in the mode. The sitting-room, 'm? Yes, seems to me to want something, and I can't for the life of me think what it is — unless" — Betsy selected a strand from the rest and brushed vigorously, pausing to comb out the ends — "unless it would be a piano. Do you think perhaps, 'm, it's a piano?"

CHAPTER VI

BETSY'S Becauses never proved anything.

"There is a shop," she said now, "because I've happened to see one. German, of course, but there's Grands and Cottages like anywhere-else because I took it upon me just to peep in. I suppose if you got one it'd be a Cottage."

It would of course be a 'Cottage.' You never somehow thought of grand pianos in connection with hiring.

"Because of the stairs," said Betsy.

"Because of the expense," said Mrs. Penstephen.

But really because you somehow always did hire cottage pianos and life was governed — even for people who set certain conventions at defiance — by what you did and what you did not, in the seventies.

"A cottage piano, of course," Mrs. Penstephen said. "But I had n't thought of one."

"It's only the look of the thing," said Betsy, plaiting now very busily. "A room without a piano, to my mind, that is —"

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Penstephen. It was like whatever Betsy had been about to say.

"Besides it is n't only that," Betsy proceeded — having just said that it was! "It's your music, 'm. Your own singing. It's I don't know how long since you've touched one — a piano, I mean. And you ought n't to give up your singing if it's only for the children's sake — let alone your own — and the Master's. Have I done it too tight, 'm?"

"No, you've done it just right."

The allusion to the children would do it if anything did.

"Nothing else I can do for you?"

"No, Betsy."

"Then good-night, 'm."

"Good-night."

Betsy knew when to stop. What she had said must have time to soak in. She was conscious of having been the least little bit disingenuous, for it was neither the look of the room nor the thought of the music that had primarily moved her to speak. These certainly had their place in her thoughts, as had the children in connection with the one indirectly, and with the other very directly indeed; but the real incentive was her longing for branchings-out, for enmeshments, entanglements even — anything that should make the usual upheavals a little more difficult. Let us then be involved with big things, with cumbersome things, with heavy things. Weight even counted. The idea was less confused than it may appear.

Nothing was said the next day. Betsy did not even impose upon her mistress's reluctant head the threatened change in the hair-dressing. To have done so would have brought up the subject with which she had allied it, too soon. She would stay her hand, reserving this till she should need it — if she should need it — for a stepping-stone or a bridge by which she might pass from the one topic to the other. "But what was it we was talking about the other night when I made the suggestion? The plait so, I thought. A piano, to be sure, 'm, — the room looking so bare." In some such way if need be. Meanwhile, need might not be.

Was not that Mrs. Penstephen humming to herself over her work? As Betsy listened there came words —

> "Oh how shall I woo thee, beautiful Spring,
> What shall my offering be —"

That was what Betsy called More Like.

The song changed presently to another. Better and better!

> "I'm afloat, I'm afloat on the deep rolling tide,
> The ocean's my home and my bark is my bride.
> Up, up with my flag, let it wave in the sea —
> I'm afloat, I'm afloat and the Rover is free,
> I'm afloat, I'm afloat and the Rover is free."

Not one of her own songs, of course, but one of the songs of the moment.

Betsy smiled to herself. It was long since her mistress had sung. Was it the talk of the night before? She sang again in the course of the next day or two.

It was now that Betsy ventured to unpack the music that lay at the bottom of one of the large trunks.

She appeared at the sitting-room door with a flat pile of it in her hands.

"I thought perhaps you would n't mind this lying here, 'm. I had to go to the bottom of the box for a paper pattern I thought might be there but was n't, and a little bit of the lining of the box wants mending, I see, when I've time. There, 'm, I'll put them on this lower shelf of the what-not where they'll be out of the way."

"Very well, Betsy. For the present. They'd better go back when you've mended the lining."

"Just for the time being, 'm — that's what I thought."

But later in the day she had the satisfaction of seeing her mistress kneeling by the what-not with a chair beside her, going through the sheets one by one. Betsy had not unpacked all — just her mistress's favourite songs. Mrs. Penstephen looked at each as she smoothed out its creases and dog's-ears. The covers of almost all of them were embellished with the steel or copper arabesques and flourishes of the fifties and sixties. Betsy, like David who knew them well, always associated these curves and twists and loops and spirals with an attempt upon the part of the engraver to picture melody itself — draw, as perhaps she, or more probably David, would have said, the sound of the tune.

"They've got folded, I'm afraid, some of them, from lying in the same place so long and under the weight of the other things in the box. I ought to have unpacked them before. But somehow it did n't seem hardly worth while. Shall I look through them and straighten them out?"

"*La Donna a Mobile.* I'd forgotten I had that. I used to sing it years ago. No, Betsy, I like doing it."

"Some of them you'll find torn, I'm afraid, but I'll soon mend those up with some strips of paper and gum."

"*Rose of the Garden, She wore a Wreath of Roses, Memory's Chaplet, The Harp that once through Tara's Halls.* I used to sing all those. I wonder whether I've forgotten them."

A miscellany rather than a repertory. A plentiful sprinkling of Claribel — many songs, inherited some of them, done with long since even then, but some that were not done with, perhaps never would be.

"Is *The Banks of Allan Water* there, 'm? I mis-remember."

It was there.

And *Barbara Allen*, and *Hunting Tower*, and *Annie Laurie*, and, oh, yes, *Drink to me only.*

Even then Betsy did not speak of the piano. But she left Mrs. Penstephen still occupied with the music and her memories, and went back to the nursery well satisfied.

Katinka, looking up from bead-threading, with the absorbed young heads one on each side of her, said "Fräulein Betsee looks happy."

The absorbed young heads looked up too.

"Frorleen Betsy is fairly this evening, she thanks you," said Betsy. "And are we to have no reading? 'Snow-white and Red-rose,' was n't it, last night when we went to bed? Are n't we to know the end of that?"

No mention of pianos the next day. But Mrs. Penstephen asked for the gum. Betsy, bringing it in to her, found her seated at a table cutting linen into strips of different sizes; the torn music before her.

"Should n't I have done that for you, 'm — or Katinka? Anything with pasting she's very good at. Mended all the children's picture books, and made them think it was a game, too. Them standing by watching like mice. Shan't I take them to her?"

But Mrs. Penstephen shook her head.

"No, Betsy. It gives me occupation. Besides, it's a pleasure to me."

That it was was evident. Betsy, departing, saw her bend over her work.

Another day passed. The music lay pressing under some heavy volumes — Frau Finkel's, part of the furniture of the sitting-room. Well, if the piano was coming ultimately the very delay was promising. Rightly seen, every day without it was a day gained, a day snatched from the wandering. But Betsy wanted an assurance. Nay, the piano itself was the assurance she wanted. It stood to her for a symbol of permanency.

But that night a conversation — nine words in all — took place between David's mother and father which it would have pleased his nurse to hear.

Mr. Penstephen was reading as his custom was in the evening, and Mrs. Penstephen was knitting. The domestic picture again if there had been any to see! She had a book open upon her knees, but she was not reading. She was not a quick knitter nor perhaps a very expert one. Even after years of knitting she had difficulties with such subtleties as the heels of stockings, graduations, and the like; but the simple nature of what she was engaged upon just then — a woollen comforter for David — would have allowed her to read while she worked if she had been so minded. So the book was there to have its part in the unconscious and unseen picture. Never surely was irregularity more regular.

She had looked over at David's father two or three times, when she broke the silence.

"John."

"Yes, dear."

"I want a piano."

"Get one."

That was all. Perhaps David's mother had some such thought as Betsy. Perhaps she, equally, learned thus that they were to stay on at Homburg. Perhaps guessing then

by analogy or by very sympathy what had been in Betsy's mind and what was still in it, she determined, with a twinkle in her happier eyes, that she would punish her. It was anyway not till the next morning that Betsy heard that her hope was to be realised.

"Of course we shall only hire it by the day," Mrs. Penstephen said.

"The day, 'm!" said Betsy, dismayed.

"What would be the use of any other arrangement? It is n't as if we were likely to be here for any time."

"No, 'm?"

"Why, we've been here five weeks already."

"Is it so much, 'm?"

Betsy's round face was a yard long.

"I doubt," she began gravely, "whether they'll let you have one — not by the day, 'm. . . ." She caught her mistress's eye and broke off. "Oh, 'm. You're laughing! Well, there!"

Yes, Mrs. Penstephen was laughing.

"Did you think I did n't see through you, Betsy? By the month, of course, you old goose. You can make your mind easy. As far as I can see we've no thought just yet of moving on anywhere. There, does that make you happy?"

"And you making game of poor Betsy! Well! But I confess I'm anxious not to begin packing up again yet awhile. And it does somehow give an air of stability, now, does n't it?"

"What does?"

"A piano."

"As anxious as that?" said Mrs. Penstephen.

"As anxious," said Betsy.

"Oh, Betsy," said Mrs. Penstephen suddenly, "how you must hate it all."

So completely did mistress and maid understand each other.

The business of choosing the piano included Betsy (for sheer kindness as Betsy knew), and, to David's joy, included David. Nothing was much more delightful to him than grown-up shoppings. He was always fairly good in a shop and did n't touch — though he did, of course, ask questions. There were shops, for which reason, that he was n't taken to — the chemist's, for easy example, where questions were apt to be embarrassing. In a music shop, however, he might safely ask about everything that he saw.

A very happy little boy put his hand into his mother's to go and choose a piano.

"For that's what we're going to choose," she said, smiling, "though Betsy here will have it it's an anchor."

"A what?" said David.

His mother nodded.

"That ships are tied to?"

"To prevent their moving away."

"I should like it to be an anchor," said David, "but I'd rather it was a piano."

"Perhaps it will be both," said Betsy.

They reached the shop. There were long rows of pianos, — more pianos than David had ever seen before in the course of his life, — for it was out of the season and nearly all were in. There were some eight or nine for his mother to choose from — not one in the remotest degree like an anchor.

David for some reason or other often thought of this day. Was it that it was one of those when his mother seemed happy? Was he perhaps more conscious than he knew that such days were rare? He went and stood beside her as she sat down to a piano and tried it. She had taken off her gloves. He liked to look at her hands on the keys. He liked the blue of the turquoise in one of her rings, and the white of the pearls in another, and the red of a ruby in a third. He looked up from her hands to her face. She seemed to be listening with her eyes.

"The treble 's a little weak, is n't it, David?"

David said "Yes," but looked astray, and she laughed.

"We'll try another one, shall we?"

The next was too stiff.

"This is better," said his mother at the third.

It was all rather like Grimm. Was that why he was enjoying it so much?

"Oh, try another."

"I don't think we shall do better than this."

But she tried another and another to please him, or just for happiness. She went back to the one she had commended. David tried now on his own account — tentatively striking a note or several in a discordant bunch.

"This is the best, is n't it?"

"Yes," said David judicially; "that one" — he pointed to the first — "the tremble 's weak, is n't it . . . the what you said."

"Yes, in that one the tremble's weak — what *you* said, David."

David laughed because she did. Betsy laughed too, though she used wrong words herself! The piano which was called the best was chosen and David was said to have chosen it. It was a very happy day.

"Contented, Betsy Prig?"

But that was David's mother's own joke and shewed how happy she was that day, for Betsy's real name was Tarver.

That afternoon the piano arrived. Frau Finkel danced on the landings in anxiety for her walls and her banisters. But all was well and the symbol of perpetuity was set up in the sitting-room. Every one came in to see; Anna and Gretchen even, and of course Katinka. Betsy looked in again early in the morning as if to make sure that it had not disappeared in the night. Then David's mother took up her singing once more — did exercises, Ah's and La's, runs and trills, for half an hour by the clock every day, so that the sound of her practising — with the very word —

established itself amongst the things which from their familiar nature seemed enduring. David would have spoken of it in connection with time future, as he would have spoken or thought of anything else that was habitual and so part of life as he knew it. To-morrow's practising seemed as certain as to-morrow's breakfast. There was a particular set of exercises that his mother used — Ah's and La's to captivating tunes — which gave him almost as much pleasure as a song with words. These exercises came to be the sound of these quiet times, as German food was the taste of them, and the *pot-pourri* of the delicious grocer's shop the smell of them.

So, with the piano for a symbol, — something, according to Betsy, to look at, or to go by, — things might be said to have taken on some semblance of stability. The 'Bradshaw' lay unopened on a shelf instead of on the writing-table, or, indeed, instead of wherever Mr. Penstephen had sat last; and was, moreover, not the issue for the current month. The literature of travel was not now in evidence — Murray's 'Guides,' hotel tariffs, local time-tables, etc. The larger trunks, empty at last, or holding such things only as were not likely to be in immediate requisition, were allowed to find their way to Frau Finkel's box-room. And for all these things, — blessed tokens, as she considered them, of the fulfilment of her heart's desire, — Elizabeth Tarver burned her grateful incense before a rosewood cottage piano.

CHAPTER VII

What a curious family David came of! Irregularity one could have understood, but what was this? If this was irregularity, never then was regularity itself more regular. Betsy looked upon it as All Because of Books and Cleverness — a certain sort of books, of course, and a certain sort of cleverness. Traced back, everything would be found to begin with the books being supposed to have found out that the Book of all was mistaken, and that the world had not been made in six days. Six days were good enough for Betsy. The books and Mr. Penstephen, and Mrs. Penstephen's late parents (who had been Advanced), and of course Mrs. Penstephen (who was not intended by nature to be advanced at all, but who believed necessarily what her parents believed before her), all asked for millions of years for the accomplishment of what every one had been accustomed to accept as the completed work of the inside of a week. The inside, too, at the outside — "Because," as Betsy would have told you, "of Sunday." It all began there. The rest, as she understood it, was the trembling, the tottering, the collapsing, that was supposed to follow such an undermining of the elaborate structure. Mr. Penstephen, the rebellious outcome of his upbringing at the hands of a Calvinistic uncle and aunt, had thought himself glad to see the whole thing go. The iron had entered deeply into his young indignant soul, and when he saw himself able, as he supposed, to pull it out, he recked little, in his pride, of what came with it. He broke away from his family. Those were the days when people who chose to think for themselves were not generally found amongst what were then known, as a matter of course, as the upper classes. The Penstephens were related to many of the oldest families in the kingdom, and the age of the baronetcy in their own was

respectable enough to make it of account. Sir John, brother of the Calvinist but lax enough himself, spoke of his God-fearing sons — despite the dimensions of the crop of wild oats they managed to sow, the one at Oxford and the other in his regiment — but always of his Infidel nephew. His sons at least conformed to the tenets of their order and sinned in accepted ways, settling down later to eminently desirable marriages. Edward, the elder, died childless and left an invalid wife, but the second, Joseph, who presently succeeded him, happily had a son to cut the Infidel out of the succession. John, David's father, — the Infidel as his relations called him, — sowed no wild oats. He did what was thought to be worse. He was young then, wielded an easy pen, and, in an amused, contemptuous sort of way, ranged himself with the fighters. The attitude of his family cannot have failed to increase his own inborn pride. He professed himself — though always a little bit as one who stoops — at war with stupidity, bigotry, superstition, and (though he loved orderliness and was at heart a Tory!) the established order. In this — the established order — he included most of the things which in themselves he found admirable. It stood, however, for what had brought it about. It stood, moreover, for the enemy's citadel. It must go with the rest. When his uncles died, the fight, to be sure, lost some of its zest for him; and, in his thirtieth year, more and more content to be amused and contemptuous, and the ardours of youth being over, he ceased active fighting. But, by then, the cry had gone up for supporters with the courage of their opinions, and he had made his protest once for all. In it — a new era being supposed, as in Rousseau's time, to have dawned or to be dawning — he was but carrying out to their logical end the views which the parents of David's mother had held so earnestly in their lives, and in it she herself, ignorant of the world, inspired by love, admiration, and sympathy, and with a confidence that was unfeigned and that was certainly in one sense not misplaced, had most unreservedly concurred.

David's father and David's mother made their protest jointly. Thus, as we see with Betsy — primarily and, so, finally — thus of the Books and the Cleverness!

David, then, on his father's side had plenty of substantial and even grandish relations, if, upon his mother's, — the Professor's Daughter as these contemptuously called her, — he had none. His father's mother had been a Miss Cheshire — of the Cheshires of Oulton, a family of some importance; hers a Miss Fitz-Urse. There was a Penstephen great-aunt. There were Penstephen cousins, and cousins once-removed, and others. There had been a Penstephen aunt; unmarried; but she had died. There were Cheshire and Fitz-Urse cousins of various degrees. And there were others and yet others as the several families branched. Amongst all these not one that he knew. He had often heard of his Aunt Flora, and had once seen her, but he could not be said to have known her. The rest were less than names to him. Occasionally a birth or a death or a marriage in their ranks may have caused some of them to be mentioned in his presence, but his mind took no record of what did not appear to concern him. Other children know even unseen connections by their birthday presents, their Christmas cards, their Valentines, messages, and the like; but happily, or unhappily, David and Georgina did not know other children. David, relationless to all intents and purposes, did not miss, then, what he was not aware that he lacked.

Two persons only were there of all who had been or were connected with him of whom he formed any clear conception. These were his mother's father and mother. They had died, as we know, long before he had been born, but so often did his mother talk to him of them, and so familiar was he with the 'daguerreotypes' of them which accompanied her wherever she went, and of the later photographs of a stern yet benign old gentleman and a calm but very bright-eyed old lady, that it would not have been difficult for him to believe that he had known them in the flesh.

David, trying to reconstruct his mother's home by the light of the daguerreotypes, or rather, perhaps, of the faded photographs, could never quite succeed. He could see a certain distance, but beyond that all was dim and confused. He could see his grandparents, his mother beside them; but never their curious friends: or, more accurately, he could never see his mother in the company their opinions drew about them. How came she at all in that galley? By reason of her parents and their views. But how came they? That always stumped him. As he thought of them they had all the early Victorian virtues, the rigidities even, the kindly primnesses. Their very clothes — something Quakerish about them — were the expression of the rectitude of disciplined lives. Were the influences of the time too strong for them? David did not think so. The qualities were inherent, the expression of them no mere concession to appearances. Why should they make concessions, moreover, who, in their beliefs which were honest, made none? They were content, too, to suffer for their beliefs. No, thinking themselves to have done with religion, they lived religiously because they were religious people. Could it be, David was to ask himself, that there were Christians, who did not, or thought they did not, believe in Christ? Were there followers who did not believe in a Leader? Only thus could he account for his grandparents, and only thus, assuredly, could he account for his mother.

If he had needed to account for her — nay, as if! Nothing would have shaken his love for her; nothing ever did. He accepted unquestioningly — as unquestioningly as she had accepted his father. However mistaken she herself may have come to see or to believe that she had been, she was never anything but wise in his eyes, never anything but good, never anything but altogether lovely.

In his mind, later, he always felt that it was of such a woman that it was written that her price was above rubies; that her children arose up and called her blessed.

"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excel-

lest them all" — it took the words of the Book which she was supposed to reject to describe her!

But that was just it. She did not reject it — did not, at all events, reject its teaching. The key to the whole mystery was there. Her parents, advanced as they thought themselves, had not rejected it either. It was thus that her own training had escaped the perils which might have beset it; thus that her home had preserved its exemplary Victorian atmosphere; thus that, whatever she did not teach David and his little sister, she taught, or strove to teach them, to seek peace and ensue it, to love righteousness and to hate iniquity.

Those were the days of transition: the adjustments, the compromises, the middle way generally, not then arrived at, for such as supposing the old order discredited knew not where to set about the search for the new. A *modus vivendi* had yet to be found for these. It may be that David's parents by very slow degrees were finding it, and that insensibly it was leading them back to the point which had seemed the parting of the ways. It may be — nay, for David (with Betsy), it may have been anything at all except wickedness of any-kind-so-ever upon the part of one of them. Perhaps nobody would ever quite understand. David, when he was old enough to do so, was content not to, and never in the course of his life was to attach any blame to her. Not quite so much could be said of his later attitude towards his father. The wrong done to his mother, howsoever willingly endured, howsoever acquiesced in, shared, welcomed even, had been too great. The wrong done to himself, and, in a far lesser degree, to Georgina, did not weigh in this feeling. The sacrifice had been his mother's and should not have been asked.

And yet even here . . .

Strangeness everywhere.

CHAPTER VIII

All went quietly for two months, for even three. The days lengthened; winter merged gradually into spring. Homburg began to put on a different air. There were leaves presently on the trees, flowers in the Kursaal Gardens. Summer would be here soon and the town fill up. Then would the ways be thronged. Groups of people would gather about the Springs while the attendants filled bunches of glass mugs — so many to the handful. David, who knew the taste of the Ludwigsbrunnen quite well, and was always to be able to remember it, liked to see the bunches of glasses. The glasses in these clusters clicked against each other as they were caught up by their handles and dipped with a soft gathering sound into the gushing spring, but none was ever broken. Some people had their own. There was a stall at which you could buy them — every sort, from plain ones like those which were supplied, to beautiful tall ones with white goats dancing upon them. These, David would have told you, urging you to buy, you could use for flowers. You could buy glass tubes too, to drink your waters through — striped ones if you liked. At the innocuous Ludwigsbrunnen, where David, in common with other children, was allowed to drink, no one used tubes. But at the Elisabethenbrunnen and the Stahlbrunnen and the Kaiserbrunnen, severely grown-up springs which no children ever tasted, you had to — Because (as he would have told you with Betsy) of your Teeth! For years any discoloured teeth that David saw he attributed to tubeless drinking at one of the stronger springs. Better to have been careful he used to think sagely! Better even to have been contented with the plain tasteless ordinary water which flowed from a stone lion's mouth near the harmless Ludwigsbrunnen, and with which he himself, at

Betsy's ordering discretion, had sometimes most unwillingly to be satisfied!

There were other things to be bought at the stalls: paper-cutters, the handle a deer's slender shank and polished hoof, the blade ivory, or brass or tortoiseshell; work-boxes with painted lids; ornaments made of black horn inlaid with ivory — the designs, nearly always, stags and hinds and fawns; penholders of carved bone with a speck of glass at the opposite end from that which held the nib — a speck of glass upon the back of which might be discerned a still minuter speck of black, which, when you held the glass up to your eyes and looked through it to the light, revealed itself as a photograph of the Kursaal or the Gardens or the Bandstand, to your infinite admiration and wonder. There were books of views — strips a yard and a half long which the sellers as you passed would shake out of the shining cardboard covers into which they folded so neatly, and hold out from arm to arm like lengths of riband; there were laces; fans; silks; there were Oriental wares: stuffs, embroideries, brasses; there was jewellery — rings, earrings, chains, bracelets, brooches; and, most memorable of all, there was the stall of the cut and polished stones. That was young David's stall — the stall of the red agate, of the ringed onyx, where his father had bought the beads for his mother (everybody wore such things then and thought them beautiful!), and where the divine marbles were; the marbles the very click of which was different from that of other marbles, as well it might be since they were themselves of agate, red or ringed, with wonderful lights and veinings and transparencies — marbles made, if you please, of 'precious' stones!

These things were not yet in their glory. But the glory of them was coming with the coming summer.

Already, after the stagnation of the winter, the town shewed signs of movement. People were arriving: Germans mostly; a few Italians and French. The English never put in an appearance in any numbers till July and

August. Landladies were bestirring themselves. Lucky ones, like Frau Finkel, had achieved winter lettings, but the majority looked to the brief season for the harvest of the year. The hotels began to restaff themselves, and such as had been closed to open their doors.

It was now that David, if he had been old enough to observe, might have seen the anxious look begin to show itself again sometimes in his mother's eyes. Afterwards — but many years afterwards — he used to wonder how far his father had seen, how far he had been conscious of what the conditions of the strange position cost her. . . .

Was it the very calm of these days that disturbed her? Were things going too smoothly? What was it that the awakening of the town threatened?

Or was it that a new thought was finding its way into her mind? Suppose the established order were right? The old way the way that had been arrived at as the most workable — perhaps the only workable way? The experiments, the siftings, the choosings, the discardings and rejectings of untold ages had resulted in what she and David's father had broken away from. What was their protest worth after all, against the accumulated teachings of un-numbered centuries?

Sometimes restlessness possessed her. These were not the days of the active woman. Books, needlework, the management of the house, the gentler arts and handicrafts, were supposed to be outlet enough for the activities then, and for the most part they effected their purpose admirably. Many a scrapwork screen, or crocheted set of doilies, or length of embroidery, was the outward expression of feelings which could only, now, be worked off by strenuous physical exercise. Women had ceased to faint and had not begun to scream. It is not probable that their nature has altered. Less was permitted to them — by each other — and they asked for less, not dreaming that anything was

denied them. David's mother may have become dimly conscious then of what was denied her.

Betsy saw; no one else apparently. She knew all things; knew through brick walls when her mistress could not settle to any of her usual occupations; when her work was put down, and taken up again, and again put down; when her hands were pressed to her eyes; when she paced the room in spirit as when she paced it in earnest. She would read and cease reading. She would play and cease playing. Even the exercises were interrupted. Something was going to happen. Betsy knew as well as if her mistress had told her so, that this was what her mistress was thinking.

Then, almost luckily, David fell ill. A rash on his little fat chest. Scarlatina? Dreadful thought. Georgina was separated from him — sent down with Katinka to rooms downstairs just then happily vacant. Small-pox? Not that sort of eruption. Chicken-pox? Not that either. Nettle rash? Something he had eaten? Ailments, pains especially, were generally that. Measles? Most likely. David with a headache and feeling rather sick (and dreadfully sorry for himself) did n't mind. What he did mind, over and above the bodily discomfort, was the strange doctor who could n't say yet. He had to put out his tongue. He did so. But he was required to shew his throat by the aid of a paper-knife — one of the black horn ones with the white stag on them, which he had always loved and which he would never be able even to like again. A tussle over this. He closed his teeth on the horrid flat thing which pressed his tongue down and nearly made him sick. Why could n't the doctor with the long black beard and the spectacles let him alone? He could n't shew his throat if they made him sick. He hated the doctor; hated his beard; hated his spectacles; hated the paper-knife. The worst of it was that his mother and Betsy took the doctor's part; took even the part of the paper-knife, which, from being a nice friendly thing, had suddenly assumed the guise of an instrument of torture.

"Let the doctor look, darling."

Very nearly a Scene now. Not with the paper-knife.

"Listen, darling. How can you be made well if you don't let us see what's the matter with you?"

David did n't want to be made well. He wanted to be left alone.

"Now, Master David, my dear . . ."

"Open de mout and let me see. I do not hurt you. Just open de mout."

Not with the paper-knife.

Three people round the stubborn bed. His mother whom he trusted; Betsy whom he trusted too; the doctor whom he did not. And the three conspiring against him.

"David!"

"Master David!"

It was poor Betsy whom he turned upon. It was no good Betsy's being Surprised. (He 'would have' for his mother, but he would not for Betsy just backing up the horrid black beard.) He pushed Betsy away; pushed her away with his elbow; turned over upon his face, was near screaming, knew he was being naughty and did n't care.

The doctor went on saying, "Just open de mout."

He would n't open de mout. He would n't even show the outside of it. When Betsy with gentle force turned him over, he completed the revolution, landing upon his face again.

Yes, very nearly a Scene. Then his mother whispered to him. He lay quite still. She whispered again. Still quite still.

"David!" A different sort of 'David.'

Very slowly he turned over.

"Send Betsy away then."

"Poor old Betsy," said Betsy, and went to the other side of the room.

"Him too."

But the doctor was surely the point at issue.

"Just for a minute."

The doctor, after a moment's hesitation on the part of David's mother, was informed of David's wish. He and his black beard and his spectacles joined Betsy at the window.

So very nearly a Scene! Only a little less understanding on the part of one of the three and it must have become one.

"Now I'll show *you*," said David.

It was all, you see, the question of the paper-knife. David could show his throat perfectly without it. Even the black beard and the spectacles, called over from the window, had to admit that David's tongue did not get in the way.

Measles. But only and most suitably — and, to David's view, since Homburg was Germany, most naturally — the mere German kind.

"What we call in England German Measles," his mother said.

"If you vish," said the doctor, who probably did not understand.

After that David rather enjoyed being ill. He was not very ill, and he was very important. He liked being infectious and took a keen interest in what he learned to call the Precautions, though so slight were precautions in those days that only David's pride could have glorified them with a capital. No carbolic sheets then to hang over the doors and catch in them every time they were opened. No overalls for infected attendants, with bands buttoned close at the wrists. No immediate washings of hands that had ministered to him. But just a keeping away of Georgina and Katinka, a desultory separating of tainted from untainted toys, a certain amount of talk, and the occasional donning of a mackintosh, if she remembered it, upon the part of Frau Finkel (a man's, by the way — left, indeed, by a former lodger), when she looked into the room to say, "Vell and how feel ve dis efening?" — or "dis morning," as the case might be. These things, however, gave David great satisfaction.

But the really satisfactory thing, from Betsy's point of view, was that David's little illness occupied David's mother. The anxious look was replaced by another. Quite a different sort of anxiety while it still was anxiety — before the doctor's visit, that is — and not anxiety at all after that; just happy solicitude. Let Master David continue ill, Betsy thought (seeing of course how little ill he was), and let her mistress's ministrations in the sick-room, which were so eminently good for her, continue also. David, his bed piled with the infected toys (which, it was said, were duly to be burnt when they should have served their purpose), was nothing loath.

Very happy days the ill days. Happier still when Georgina developed German Measles too — an attack even milder, more German, as David said, than David's own — and the two had no longer to be separated. She had probably, David thought, caught hers from his love which he had sent her every day and which must, after all, have been infectious.

It seemed unnecessary now to keep Katinka out of the room any longer, as, if it was fated that she was to have the malady, she must certainly have contracted it by this time. So Katinka, Mrs. Penstephen having sounded her father as to his views, was added to the happy party.

David has a photograph of Katinka to this day. It is easy to believe that the possessor of the pretty smiling face which it presents brought joy into the strange household, or, at the least, increased the sum of the happiness of its members. No wages could adequately have represented her value to the growing young minds, just as no wages could have wiped out the family debt to the incomparable Betsy. Mrs. Penstephen at closer quarters with her, now that for so long at a stretch the walls of one room held them both, — herself and Katinka, — realised more than ever her own and her children's good fortune.

And, since everything that occupied her mind gently was good for it and for her, Betsy encouraged her to talk of

Katinka. Mrs. Penstephen was wondering whether the girl would come to her permanently.

"One says permanently," she said that night when Betsy was brushing her hair, — "I mean whether she would come away with us."

It was Betsy's belief that Katinka would.

"What she'll do when our time's up here, or what she'd do if she had to part with Master David and Miss Georgina, I don't know."

"Her father may want her at home or have other views for her."

"She may have views of her own, 'm. I think that's much more likely. I should ask her anyway."

Mrs. Penstephen consulted David's father and did ask her. She put the question tentatively. Supposing they should want her, she said.

Katinka flushed with pleasure. She was now sleeping at Frau Finkel's. Was she not making her way? She remembered how at first Mrs. Penstephen had hesitated about taking her at all. Of course she would go. She even clapped her hands, and then blushed again for her childishness.

Mrs. Penstephen smiled and Katinka felt, as she always did when her mistress's smile was for her, that she would and could die for her gladly.

"We must think about it, then. There would be your father to ask and also to consider."

He would not object, Katinka declared. He wished her to be with nice people — a distinguished English family.

"And always have I myself vished to go to England."

But at the word England the look came into Mrs. Penstephen's face which Katinka had seen in it at the first interview. To her it represented withdrawal. Again she remembered, but with different feelings from those of a few moments before when the thought had come to her, how Mrs. Penstephen had hesitated to engage her — nay, had

seemed to shrink from engaging her. All her elation was suspended.

"It would n't be England," Mrs. Penstephen said. "We should be travelling. I don't know yet where it would be. But it is almost certain that it would n't be England."

Katinka dared to breathe again.

"Anywhere," she said. "It is my wish, yes, to see England. But anywhere. I should like to travel. Oh, it does not matter where. Where the gracious lady is that is England for me."

Nothing was settled, but it began to be felt that Katinka's place in the family was no longer temporary and Katinka took heart of grace. What, after all, could hinder? Mrs. Penstephen, her hesitation apart, seemed to wish it. The children Katinka was sure would wish it. Fräulein Betsy certainly wished it.

"And mind you, there is n't many girls I could stand," Betsy said frankly. "As for nursery-maids generally, they're more plague than profit, that I've always considered. But you, Katinka, my dear, for all your outlandish name — making me think of pots and kettles to mend every blessed time I say it! — you are somehow different, now, are n't you?"

"You tink I shall be engaged?" said Katinka, her eyes shining.

Betsy only said "We shall see"; and Mrs. Penstephen continued to say nothing further. As the days went on, however, it did appear to be assumed all round that Katinka was 'permanent.'

Meanwhile just peaceful busy days — for Mrs. Penstephen, her restlessness over; for Betsy, content with her observations; for Katinka, waiting. In the course of a very few the children in turn went through the various stages from slops to solids; from being allowed up for an hour to being up in earnest; from being up to being out.

They were convalescent. They were well. Followed the very moderate disinfectings deemed all that was necessary: a little scrubbing, a little burning of sulphur; Frau Finkel, even, asked no more. And when it came to the point was it really necessary to burn the infected toys? Even the sensible Betsy said All Nonsense. Even Mr. Penstephen, the matter referred to him, said he did n't suppose it mattered. The doctor said, "Oh, just put dem in de room mit de sulphur." Yet there had been at least the talk about Precautions!

Betsy perhaps hit the nail on the head when she said And Besides.

"Yes, Betsy?"

Betsy looked up from the things under discussion: a woolly bear, a doll with curls, some coloured picture-books, a stuffed elephant, a clown that played cymbals when you pinched his rag stomach, a dancing nigger, a steam-engine, a clock-work mouse and a humming-top — all, with the exception perhaps of the steam-engine and the humming-top and, but more doubtfully, of the nigger and the clock-work mouse, eminently capable of harbouring germs, — and knocked disinterestedness out of all precautions. "You can't catch things from yourself 'm," she said, — "not that ever I've heard of, and it is n't as if it was only one of them had had it. Why, they've both had their measles. What possible need?"

Well, as far as may be known, the spared toys did no mischief, and in course of time, it is to be supposed, became once more innocuous.

For the rest, the calm unthreatened days looked like to continue. David's mother resumed her practising. But the dead season drew to an end.

CHAPTER IX

THE train of Mrs. Penstephen's thought having, as we have seen, been gently interrupted, something no longer seemed about to happen. Without apprehension or anxiety she saw shutters opened, blinds pulled up, the occasional but more frequent carriage laden with luggage. Nothing was changed. The year was moving. Then why was her mind easier? That the blue might be more serenely blue from which the bolt fell? Almost it seemed so.

Nothing, anyway, could have been bluer than the sky. There was not the smallest warning. Less than none, for what shot from the unclouded azure to drop at her startled feet was neither more nor less than Katinka — poor adoring Katinka about whom in this connection Mrs. Penstephen's misgivings were now as if they had never been.

David's birthday was approaching. He was to be Eight after having been only Seven for a period which seemed to him quite unjustifiably long. The conditions of his life tending probably to sharpen his perceptions, he had, indeed, perhaps been eight mentally (if not nine or even ten) for a considerable time. He was now to be Eight in earnest. He was to have a party — not a real Party, of course, since there was no one to ask to it — but a party of sorts: Katinka's brother and sister to tea and possibly Anna and Gretchen: and there were to be games and a Surprise. Katinka was arranging the Surprise.

For days the Surprise had been in the air. A mask was part of it, for David had caught a glimpse of a pink shining face lying amazingly upon the table at which Betsy did her sewing, before Katinka, pouncing upon it with a little scream, had whisked it out of sight and hidden it away in a drawer. But what the whole secret was neither Katinka

nor Betsy, who was in it (and also, indeed, like the hidden mask, was somehow part of it), would divulge. They spoke mysteriously of a Distinguished Guest who was to be expected at the party — but not till after tea — and the rest was silence and evasions. We, who are more than eight or nine or ten but have been all three, may guess perhaps at our old friend the Dwarf. David exhausted himself in guessings and could not guess. His face, we may suppose, was set towards his birthday.

Blue skies, as we see; and under them tranquil happy expectancy. David's birthday was next week; David's birthday was the day after to-morrow: David's birthday was to-morrow. His mother found herself looking forward to it; his father, even, in one of those rare moments when a look perhaps or a note in his voice made sudden amends for everything, said there was something in anniversaries. Not a cloud, not the shadow of a cloud, in the blue. Then, out of the tranquillity a mysterious summons to Katinka — a note from her father.

Gretchen had brought the note to the nursery where the nursery dinner was in progress. Katinka, 'cutting up' for Georgina, had taken it with wonder. She laid down the knife and fork, and Betsy, that the meat might not get cold, drew Georgina's plate toward her and went on with what Katinka had been doing. David, as curious as Katinka herself as to the contents of the letter, found time, none-the-less, to go on watching the work of the cutting-up which always interested him. Betsy held the knife in quite a different way from Katinka. Katinka sometimes cut against the fork in a way that would have been said to scratch it if Frau Finkel's forks had been silver; Betsy never. With one eye on Katinka and her letter and the waiting Gretchen, who probably was curious too, he yet saw how Betsy paused in the cutting to push a little bit of fat or gristle to the side of the plate. Georgina, her spoon in her hand and also, it is to be admitted, in and out of her

mouth, was more interested just then in the food that was being prepared for her than anything else.

"What can he want?" Katinka said blankly when she had read and made known the contents of her father's note. She was to come home at once. No explanation; nothing!

Betsy asked if anybody could be ill. She paused in her cutting, and Georgina thumped on the table with the handle of her spoon. Betsy continuing her work answered herself with "He'd say, sure to, if any one was ill," and asked who had brought the note.

Katinka asked Gretchen. The two became voluble in German. Betsy, retaining the knife and fork, gave Georgina her plate, and said she and the children, at any rate, would go on with their dinners.

Katinka's brother had brought the note and had said nothing.

"Then nothing's really the matter," decided Betsy. "Have your own dinner and go round directly after."

She helped Katinka as she spoke, and Katinka sat down. Gretchen stood for a moment or two to join in the expression of wonderings and speculations, and then went back to the kitchen. Katinka made haste with her meal and presently was ready to go.

"Shall I ask Mrs. Penstephen?"

Betsy shook her head.

"They won't be done luncheon and you won't be gone long. I'll tell her I gave you leave to run round."

Katinka put on her hat and coat as Gretchen, reappearing, brought in the nursery pudding.

"Back in few minutes den," said Katinka. She nodded and smiled and was gone. They heard her tripping lightly down the stairs.

The nursery dinner was finished and cleared away. It was then two o'clock. The children would go for their walk at three o'clock. Katinka would be back long before that. Betsy, propping *East Lynne* against her work basket so that

she might read a few lines from time to time as she worked, went back to her sewing. David and Georgina amused themselves with a box of bricks — David building, Georgina demolishing. David builded methodically and very carefully. Georgina knocked down even when she purposed to help. "Look out," sang David every now and then.

Half past two came; a quarter to three. Five more minutes and it would be time to begin to get ready.

What could be keeping Katinka? The grocer's shop was not more than a few minutes' walk. The hands of the clock moved on to the hour.

"Well, we must go without her," Betsy said to herself, and called the children.

"But why *does n't* Katinka . . . ?" said David. Georgina echoed his question.

"And so she will," said Betsy, "by the time we're ready. Get your hat now, Master David, there's a good boy. You'll find it on the bed. And Miss Georgie, come and be dressed."

The children were presently ready. Betsy herself was ready. She buttoned her gloves. Still no Katinka.

And then, suddenly, Katinka! But a Katinka whom David's mother, coming, at some unaccustomed sound, out on to the landing to see if anything were the matter, hardly recognised — a sobbing Katinka with a face swollen and sodden with tears; a shaken Katinka who flung herself on to the ground and clasped her mistress's knees.

David, before he and Georgina were urged gently but firmly into the nursery by Betsy, there to besiege her with questions and even to fight against their temporary imprisonment, reproaching her, accusing her, saw his mother's face grow white to the lips, and the look upon it which he had seen there at Brussels.

"What's been done to her?" he cried, struggling against his own tears. "What have they done?"

But he could hardly have told whether at that moment he meant to Katinka or to his mother.

Outside, Mrs. Penstephen raised Katinka to her feet and led her to her own bedroom. She went in, pushing the girl gently before her, much as Betsy had impelled David and Georgina into the nursery: and then, like her, shut the door.

Katinka threw herself again to her knees, sobbing and rocking her body to and fro.

"Katinka, you must n't," Mrs. Penstephen said.

The colour was slowly coming back to her lips, but the look which Betsy knew, and which David, young as he was, knew also, and which David's father must have known too, was there — was graven there, as if this time it would never wear away or be removed.

Katinka moaned and rocked herself.

"You must tell me what has happened," said Mrs. Penstephen. "Try to calm yourself."

But Katinka only moaned and wept and rocked the more.

"Katinka, listen to me. You must n't give way like this. Get up now from the ground and come and sit down beside me here. You must control yourself or I can't talk to you. That's better. No, sit down beside me. I wish it."

"Oh, Madame," breathed Katinka.

Mrs. Penstephen drew her down on to the sofa. Katinka gave a little gulp, and, turning away her head, buried her face in her arm. She sobbed for a few moments, but more quietly.

"You are so good to me," she said brokenly when she could speak. "I have been so happy. Never have I been so happy before."

"You're leaving us, are n't you, Katinka? It is that, I think, is n't it?"

But now again Katinka could not speak.

Mrs. Penstephen waited. Katinka must tell her, but already she knew that there was nothing to tell, or rather that she had nothing to learn. She had been through all

this before, though the conditions had never been these. The more the conditions changed, however, the more what underlay them remained the same thing. She sat looking at the girl's thick hair and heaving shoulders, thinking her own thoughts.

Presently she glanced round the room. A large square looking-glass in a carved gold frame hung at an angle upon the wall opposite, and in it she saw herself and Katinka. The picture she saw must, if she could have seen it with later eyes, have been like a Millais illustration to a novel in the pages of a magazine of that date. To her there was nothing odd in the amplitude of her draperies, the size of her jet brooch, or the abundant trimmings of a dress which Betsy considered almost too simple. What did seem odd to her was that it should be Katinka who wept and not she. A stranger, she thought, would have seen in Katinka a penitent if not The Penitent, and in her The Confessor or The Counsellor. A Kind Lady gives Advice to a Young Girl in Trouble. And the case was in reality, if not exactly the reverse, yet almost the reverse. It was she who had been found out, she who should be the suppliant, she whose head should be bowed! Tears found their way to her own eyes but she blinked them back.

"I ought n't to have taken you," she said. "I did hesitate. I should have trusted the feeling that made me do this. Or I ought to have told your father. Yet I could not have told him. No, that sounds as if I were ashamed of what I have done. And that would n't be true." She paused. "You see I have guessed, Katinka," she said gently. "Your father has learnt that according to accepted ideas and to all rites — civil as well as religious — Mr. Penstephen and I are not married. Is n't it so?"

"Ah, Madame, please — please —"

But the relation in which the two stood to each other — mistress and maid, employer and servant — was nothing to David's mother just then.

"He thinks that you ought n't to live with us."

"I will not go," said Katinka vehemently. "I will not. I do not understand but I know you are good. Oh pardon, Madame, that I should even speak like this. You had reasons. It is enough for me. Oh, Madame — I am ashamed that my father — that I — through me — me whom you have treated so kindly — Oh, oh, oh —" her voice trailed away miserably into inarticulate sobbings.

"But, my child, your father 's right. It's true that he does n't know the circumstances in which the step was taken. He would think probably that there were obstacles in the way of our marriage. There were none. What we did, we did openly. We dispensed, that's all, with forms in which we did n't believe. Whether, if either of us had quite foreseen the consequences, we should have had the courage of our views I — sometimes I don't know, Katinka." Her voice shook, and she paused again for a moment. "But we did what we thought to be reasonable and — and right. No, I know you're not asking. Perhaps that's why I wish to say these things to you. But actually they're beside the point. Your father is right. Thinking as he does, he could n't do otherwise than wish you to go home. It would be a poor sort of father who would leave his child in what he thought to be danger. You would n't like him to be indifferent."

"No, no, but I am so ashamed. If he knew he would understand. He does not understand. It is that that you must pardon. But oh, I cannot go, I cannot. And I thought perhaps you would take me with you when you go from Homburg." She had been speaking in German. She broke now into impassioned English. "Oh, Madame, if you vould overlook dis. My father by himself never. It is dese ladies, what dese ladies have said to him. I am ashamed for him as for myself. But it is dese ladies. Oh, why did dey come to make us all so unhappy?"

"Some ladies told him?"

"De ladies who vere here last year and every year already. Dey have always de great suite of apartments next

door to us — in de big house at de corner, and dey talk vid my father as dey pass. Dey come early in de year and dey stay for de season after. A very grand lady — English — de Countess of Harbington."

David's mother made a little movement.

"Lady Harbington is in Homburg?"

"T'ree days," said Katinka.

There was a pause before either spoke then. There were sounds outside: the opening of a door and voices; the children's (protestant), Betsy's (quietly authoritative). Betsy, who had probably guessed, had decided, it is to be supposed, that the children were best out of the way, and was taking them for their walk. She was having some difficulty. "I don't want to go out," was a shout that penetrated to the bedroom. There was the sound of running but arrested footsteps, and, "No you're not to go to your mamma's room, do you hear me!" David might be pictured for one moment tugging at a restraining hand. There was even, perhaps, the suggestion of authority defied and a scuffle. Mrs. Penstephen rose and went softly to the door, ready to lock it, if need be, or to go out on to the landing and lend Betsy the support of her presence. But David contented himself with a shout for Katinka — which Georgina was heard to echo, and which sent Katinka back to her sobbing — and presently the sounds moved their location and died away on the stairs. The hall-door was heard to close.

Mrs. Penstephen, who was not Mrs. Penstephen, went back to the sofa whence Katinka had now sunk to the floor. There, half-kneeling, half-sitting, the girl wept into the hollow of her arm.

Mrs. Penstephen sat down beside her, and drew her head gently on to her own knees. She was such a child, Katinka. She soothed her now as one soothes a child.

"There," she murmured. "There. There, Katinka. You've nothing to reproach yourself with. That must be your comfort. I, on the other hand, have. Not what your father thinks, perhaps — certainly not what Lady Harbing-

ton thinks. I ought to have spoken to your father privately before I engaged you. He would then have had the choice of letting you come to me or not as he thought best. You can tell him that I don't think, whatever he may have heard of us, that we have done you any harm, and you can tell him that I am very sorry to lose you. You've been a good girl, and perhaps more useful to my children than I even know myself, yet. But you must go, Katinka."

"To-day?"

"Now."

"Oh, Madame. Now? Now?"

"Before the children come back."

Well, it was a day of tears. David's mother herself was crying before all was over. With streaming eyes Katinka packed her little box. The things which she had brought from home with such joy when she had come to Frau Finkel's to sleep would go back wetted with her tears. She had to hurry, too, lest the children should come in from their walk.

"Dey vill miss me. Oh, tell me dey vill miss me." She took a last look round. She opened a drawer and drew forth a shining pink mask. "Oh, de Dvart—de Dvart for de party to-morrow. Who vill do de body and de legs of de Dvart?"

Mrs. Penstephen smiled.

"The Dwarf?" she said. "I believe we shan't have much heart ourselves for the party to-morrow, Katinka."

"Oh, but Herr David. He must have his party."

"I will help Betsy, then. I promise you. Master David shall have his party."

"Katinka vill be here in de spirit," said Katinka. "No one vill see her. But dat is just as vell, for if dey could see her she vould be veeping."

She put away the mask in its hiding-place and closed the drawer.

"What had they said of us?" Mr. Penstephen asked

David's mother in the course of the long talk that followed.

"What would they say, John? I did n't ask Katinka. I don't quite know what occurred. They take an interest in the family. They probably asked Katinka's father about her, and heard that she was in a situation with nice English people. Very distinguished, perhaps. A gentleman and a lady, a little boy and a little girl. Penstephen the name. If they said that we had been turned out of a hotel in Brussels it would be true. John, John, I can't bear it. I thought I could, but I can't. Outcasts. David. My baby. Every one pointing at us. Shrugging their shoulders. Turning their backs. My children's mother like a woman of the streets. Wanderers all of us. Branded. Dwellers on sufferance. Our own people, strangers, the very servants. It will kill me, John. I'm done. I can't face it any more. I can't go on . . ."

Like Katinka's her voice trailed away to inarticulate miseries.

CHAPTER X

No distinguished stranger came to David's party. There was no party to come to. Betsy's mistress was ill; Betsy, single-handed now, too busy to think of parties, and with divided cares as nurse and nurse, far too busy to think of impersonating the head, trunk, legs, and feet, or even the less responsible hands and arms of dwarfs, to please any one, birthday or no birthday. So, to herself poor exercised Betsy. Her heart, bleeding for her mistress, bled in necessarily smaller measure for David. But it was because it did so copiously bleed that, to the children that day, she seemed cross when in reality she was only grieved and grieving.

For David the world seemed to have collapsed about him. With Katinka mysteriously gone, his mother suddenly ill, and the stuffing knocked out of his birthday, the day was dark indeed. The shadow of the sick-room was upon the nursery, whither borrowed Gretchen, amiable, but wholly incompetent after competent, wonderful Katinka, brought her sewing that she might watch over Betsy's charges and leave Betsy free to minister to her suffering lady. David and Georgina played half-heartedly with David's birthday presents.

But the shadow of more than the sick-room was over the house. The inevitable talk was going on downstairs. Gretchen, though she smiled and smiled, probably felt she was missing it. There were visitors, of course, in the kitchen. Betsy, super-sensitive perhaps, knew every time that a door was opened and shut. Oh, Frau Finkel was friendly enough. She would not encourage gossip, but Frau Finkel was human, and Betsy knew landladies. She knew Downstairs, too, all the world over. Was it any wonder that, to David with a birthday and Georgina too young to under-

stand anything, she seemed cross when she was only heart-sick and on edge!

What ailed David's mother? She lay white and wide-eyed in the bed gazing at the ceiling and moaning faintly when she stirred. The strength seemed to have gone out of her. She was like one who has had a paralytic stroke, but she had not had a stroke. Her mind seemed elsewhere and yet to be feverishly occupied. Her lips moved sometimes, and Betsy, as if the secret of the illness might be learnt from the sufferer herself, tried in vain to catch the words she did not speak. She might have been asleep and dreaming but though her state had succeeded to sleeplessness she was not asleep. The Beard, the first of the doctors to be called, said she had had a Shoke — did not even say that she must have had one. Every one in the house knew the nature of the shock which the poor lady had sustained, and it was Anna who had been sent for him. The second opinion confirmed his. It was accepted that Mrs. Penstephen was suffering from shock — which may have accounted for her condition, but did not very clearly explain it. Betsy saw, however, that it was not her mistress only who had had a shock. Her exercised eyes were drawn to her master again and again from the bed.

All day Mrs. Penstephen lay in the same state. It was impossible to say whether she was actually suffering. Mr. Penstephen went in and out. It was he now who could settle to nothing. Neither his books nor his writings could hold him. No question as to whether *he* was suffering! Betsy's heart shed some of its blood for him too. But it was all his own fault — nay, it was that it *was* his own fault! She could have shaken him, and felt also that she could have wept for him.

"Is she better, Betsy? Is she in pain? Does she know us, do you think? Does she? Do you, Mary? Mary darling, don't you know me? Don't you see me? It's John. Don't

you hear me? Look at me. I'm here beside you. Mary, Mary."

She made no sign, unless a movement of her head — was it ever so little from side to side? — was a sign. Was she denying him? Refusing to listen to him? Refusing to comfort or be comforted.

Betsy, as much for his sake as for her mistress's, said now: "I would n't sir, I think. Really I would n't. I'd let her be. We must give the medicine time. Sedatives they said — just something to calm the nerves. They're not alarmed about her. I'd go out a bit, sir, if I might advise."

"How can I go out?" said Mr. Penstephen.

"I would, though," said Betsy. "I'd go out, sir, and come back and maybe find her better. The doctor 's coming again this evening, did n't he say? I dare say he would n't expect much change till later." (She was contradicting herself, as indeed she perceived, but that did not seem to her just then greatly to matter — or even to matter at all so long as she went on talking that he might not talk.) "So there'd be plenty of time, and it would do you good, sir."

But he would not be persuaded.

"Do they know what's the matter with her? Do you?"

Betsy did not answer.

"Have you ever seen any one like this before?"

"Bless you, yes, sir." She sought about for an instance, and, not finding one, took refuge in "If it was you, sir, or any male, I should be more anxious."

"But she's never been hysterical," he said after a pause — "never shown the smallest sign of any weakness of that sort. She hysterical! It's not to be thought."

"No, sir. But that would not put it out of the question. And it would n't, perhaps, be weakness anyway. What doctors know is only enough to tell them that they can't know. No man could, sir, — gentle or simple, — and you 'll excuse me for speaking so free. We know, sir, but if you ask us, we're done! It would be a clever woman who could tell you. No, sir, not weakness — not necessarily.

Differentness I should call it. But my mistress will come out of this you'll see."

Mr. Penstephen heard her attentively. She had n't done with him; she did n't mean to be done with him just yet. But this was not the moment.

"If I could know that she was n't suffering."

He was so entirely at her, Betsy's, mercy!

"It's like when you groan under laughing-gas, sir. You cry out, perhaps, but you don't know about it."

She wanted him to go. She wanted to have her mistress to herself if only that she might put her arm round her, as you put your arm about a child, and try to get comfort through to her. She thought she could, far off as the troubled spirit seemed, if she could but have her to herself.

"Take Master David," she said at last. "After all it is the poor child's birthday."

That settled it. Mr. Penstephen, who would not for his own sake, would for David's. Gretchen was told to get him ready.

"I get myself ready," said David.

David had, it is to be feared, an uncomfortable walk. His father talked to him with wandering attention or did not talk to him, and David, sensitive to influences, did not know which was most disconcerting. Moreover, walking down what Betsy called the Chrysalis Strasse, they walked so fast that David had difficulty in keeping up. He was wondering when his father would see that he was setting a pace which would oblige his own shorter legs to run if he was to maintain it, when his father suddenly became aware of his case.

"David, my boy, I was forgetting you."

David had to say, "Oh, it's all right, Father," though it had been nothing of the sort.

"You set it, David. I'll keep pace with you."

"No, you, Father."

"This about right? Change step. There, that better?"

It was — if David's father would only have remembered, but in five minutes David found himself breaking into a trot once more.

Talk, pace, atmosphere, all equally disturbed. But through the uncomfortableness he was somehow conscious of something which seemed to bring his father nearer to him, or to bring him nearer to his father, than ever before. It was not exactly what was said, or what was not said in the frequent embarrassing silences. It went deeper than talk or than silences. If he could have put what he dimly felt into words at all, he would have said that he knew for the first time that his mother was in both of them — and have meant much more than that for the moment she was in the mind of each of them. His mother was part of his father as she was part of himself. His father was thus a more intimate relation than he had hitherto supposed him. No words however for any of this. These things were feelings. You hardly spoke of them even if you could.

The walk was marked by one incident. Near the Kursaal they passed two ladies, who sat upon a seat, and, by the spread of their draperies and something of importance in the aspect of at least one of them, contrived to make it look like a throne. They seemed to be arguing — not perhaps about anything in particular. The impression, indeed, which an acute observer would have got would probably have been the true one: that they argued because argument was the form which any conversation between them naturally assumed. As they wrangled, the important one, who had a parasol with a green silk fringe, and whose cheeks were very pink, and who wore primrose kid gloves and many bracelets, looked about her. With calm eyes, and without relaxing her part in the argument, she took stock in an impersonal, aloof sort of way, of all who passed.

"But that's what I say, you spoke without thinking. You always do."

David could hear quite well as he approached with his father.

"I know I do, dear, but in this case I did n't. Besides I don't think I do, and even if I did —"

"I don't suppose you know whether you did or did not —"

The words that fell on his nearing ear are of no special significance. We, no more than he, are to know what the ladies were discussing, though with him we may allow ourselves to wonder. But what was significant was that, the calm impersonal eye of the one, and the suffused, deprecating eye of the other, resting upon the approaching pair at the same moment, the ladies simultaneously nudged each other, and even ceased speaking.

David saw. David recognised. David's father, occupied with his own thoughts, did not see. David could not have told why he did not tell him, but he did not, either then or afterwards; and in this curious day, this strange eighth anniversary of his birthday, this reticence of his took its place amongst the odd intangible things which seemed to bind him, or seemed like to bind him, more closely to his father. The shared secret, the unshared secret — which shows sometimes most understanding? What could it have been which held him back from speaking of what he had seen? Shyness? The uncomfortableness of the uncomfortable walk? Or some vaguely protective instinct? This, one would say, for such binding. But was it possible? David looking back, did not know.

Betsy meanwhile, alone with her mistress, watching, tending, ministering, had a mind which was not idle. Betsy could see into the heart of things and into the hearts of people. Betsy, who had achieved the piano, might, with such powers of achievement, be counted on not to stop at

pianos. It was as she looked from the bed to her master that she had seen suddenly the lever which her mistress's illness had placed in hands, which, untutored as they were, she had not often found to fail her. There was help for her moreover in this very connection. For if the Finger of God had been discernible as she believed in David's trifling illness, nothing less than the whole Divine Hand (we are talking of hands!) was to be perceived in the more serious illness of David's mother. Betsy's anxiety thenceforward was tempered by hope.

She was not less anxious. She who knew what the strain had been, knew also now what the strain must have been. The accumulated sufferings of years were expressing themselves in this present suffering. It is unlikely that Betsy had heard of the Death of the Thousand Cuts. But she had heard of breaking-point (nearer the mark, perhaps) and of last straws and the like, and it was breaking-point which her long-suffering mistress had reached. Strange that the last straw should have been supplied, howsoever indirectly, by Katinka!

Presently, thinking busily as she sat by the sufferer, Betsy saw that it could only have been supplied by one who loved her, or for whom she had regard. It had to be Katinka, then, — poor aching Katinka. Poor, though? Poor? Katinka, who adored where she had overwhelmed, would not, could she know, have thought so. Blessed rather. Yes, blessed so to have been chosen, though she never should know of her blessedness!

"I should see to it that she did know," Betsy promised herself, however, and went on with her thinking. This might be Shoke as the doctors called it; they were wise enough (with Betsy!) to know that it was not a stroke. It was the nervous imitation of a stroke — overstrained nature's counterfeit of something which had actually been escaped. To all seeming Mrs. Penstephen was slightly paralysed, but it was only in seeming. Presently, Betsy believed firmly, the arrested faculties would resume their

functions; the wandering spirit, like the dove to the ark, would come back to the body, the light of consciousness shine freely in the clouded open eyes.

From time to time the low moaning sound came from the bed — the moaning which had so distressed David's father.

"What is it, dearie, 'm?" Betsy would murmur — the ''m,' even in her solicitude, for respect, and to qualify the 'dearie' which she could not help. "What is it dearie, 'm? Anything we can do for you? Anything you'd like? Is it your poor head?" (It was the 'Where does it hurt?' to a bruised child!) "Aching, is it? No, 'm, you can't tell. Aching all over, perhaps — and tired. Oh, tired, I know. There. Betsy's hand's cool — if it is n't too rough?" She laid a hand tenderly on the low beautiful forehead. "There, my darling. There, is that better?"

As to a child. But the right way, surely, in that sick-room. Betsy knew — seemed to know by instinct. There was a crooning quality in her voice when she spoke thus — the children knew it well, and sick or sorry or sleepless, had often responded to it — and her hand could lull pain. Something did get through perhaps to the wounded spirit. The moaning grew less.

"There," she said, "there." She might have been putting their mother to sleep as so often she had put them.

Less than an hour brought Mr. Penstephen and David back. David begged to be allowed to see his mother, but Betsy said no. She went in to tea in the nursery while David's father sat with her mistress, and answered protesting questions as best she could. David would be able, she hoped, to see his mother next day.

Not to-day at all?

Not to-day at all.

David's face fell. More than anything in the world he wanted to see his mother.

"Now, if you're going to be a spoiled boy —" began

Betsy. Which shewed that the strain was beginning to tell upon her. She was supposed to be cross, we must remember.

David's answer, old as he was, was to burst into tears. Which shewed how the strain told on him.

CHAPTER XI

THE lights were low in the sick-room where Betsy sat, dozing a little sometimes, but, even when she dozed, alert for the smallest sound or movement in the bed. She had refused to go to her own, — to give up her place by her mistress to any one. A pretty pass if an able-bodied woman of her years could n't do without rest for a night! Besides, she would be resting. At six o'clock, since Frau Finkel was so kind, she would cede the chair to her and go and lie down for an hour or two, but, meanwhile, with the pillow which Anna had fetched for her, she would do very well. Tired? She was n't tired. It was n't as if there was anything to do. All that she had to do was just to be there doing nothing, and to give the patient her medicines and nourishments at the proper times.

"Good-night to you all," she said three or four times before she could rid herself of willing helpers.

"If you vant anyting in de night, you touch de bell, von't you? I sleep so lightly, I hear de moment you ring. Hot vater or anyting like dat, you can have in few minutes already. Or de doctor — You have matches, yes? And de candle? And spirit for de ætna?"

"Everything," said Betsy. "If I want more than that I'll ring, I promise you."

So she got rid of them. Mr. Penstephen was the last to go. He was sleeping in the dressing-room at the end of the passage. To him, too, she had said good-night. But that, perhaps, was not more than a matter of form.

He had come back at one o'clock. Mrs. Penstephen was quiet — not moaning, but her eyes were open as before, and, though he bent over her, she did not appear to see him. He went out abruptly. He had come back at two o'clock.

There was no change. She had taken the hot milk which had been ordered her.

"She takes nourishment as good as gold," Betsy said. It seemed impossible to get away from that way of speaking — as of a child, or to a child. A sick person, but more especially this one, was a child to Betsy — and a sick child at that. Nothing much was said and Mr. Penstephen went away as before.

With his last going the house had seemed to become very still. In the small hours the night grew chilly, and Betsy, moving very gently, put more wood on the fire in the stove. There were no sounds from the street. It was now that Betsy sat most still. Dozing and waking, waking and dozing, she sat in the big chair. . . .

"It's no good, Betsy, I can't sleep."

It was Mr. Penstephen again at the door. He closed it, and, putting down his candle on a table at hand, came over once more to the bed. Betsy had risen and they stood on each side of it, looking down at the motionless figure. The moment for which Betsy had waited was coming.

"If she would close her eyes," Mr. Penstephen said. "The open eyes that don't see . . ."

He, like Betsy before him, laid a cool hand upon the low smooth forehead. He bent down and laid his face against the face upon the pillow.

Betsy did not speak. She saw the broad shoulders move, and waited.

"What's to be done?" he said at last.

"Nothing now," she said slowly.

"How do you mean, nothing?" he asked, and because he was frightened he sounded angry.

Betsy nodded her head and repeated the words.

"But what do you mean?" he asked her. "Why do you say 'now'? You don't mean that something ought to have been done and was n't! You don't think — Betsy!"

"No, sir. Everything is being done that can be. Nothing

more can be now. It's only now that nothing can be done."

"I suppose you'll tell me what you do mean presently," said Mr. Penstephen helplessly.

Betsy looked him full in the face.

"My mistress will come out of this," she said as she had said earlier. "It'll be then, sir."

There was a pause during which the two looked at each other across the bed. There was dead silence in the house. Not a mouse seemed to be stirring; not a board creaked. The flame of the candle which Mr. Penstephen had not extinguished burnt steadily, and seemed by its unwavering stillness to lay stress upon the universal stillness.

"I don't follow you," said Mr. Penstephen at length. "I'm astray — or you are. I have n't understood a word you've been saying."

"I could speak more plainly," said Betsy.

"Then for Heaven's sake, do."

It was all Betsy wanted. She gathered herself up.

"Very well, sir," she said. "Though there's one thing I suppose that I ought to ask, and that's that you'll be so good as to remember that you told me to." She did not pause for Mr. Penstephen's nod — though he did nod — but proceeded. "I've seen this coming, sir, — seen it coming for years if you have n't. I've not lived by the side of my lady here without knowing something of her and of what she was suffering. This is n't a shock, sir, in one sense, any more than it's a stroke — not any one shock, sir. It's a adding up of blow upon blow, of shock upon shock. New wounds on old wounds; wounds on wounds that were n't healed. Some people would n't have felt them. There's natures like that — blunted or toughened or maybe not sensitive at all. But hers is n't like that. Every stripe told. Goodness, when I think of it! I've seen her flush to the roots or go white — a head turned, perhaps, or a child called away from the children. That 'urt most — when it was the children; Master David or Miss Georgina, one or

the other — though most, I've sometimes thought, when it was Master David. Visiting it on them, I suppose she thought, and Master David nearer the time when he would understand. She never said anything. She is n't one to complain, is she? — not Mrs. Penstephen, sir. I've seen her wince as if she had been struck. Yes, though she pretended not to see or to hear, whichever the case was, or, if that was past doing, at least not to mind. I've thought of the Bible, sir, often, which you don't believe in and which she thinks she does n't, sir, — 'Forgive them for they know not what they do.' You'll know, sir, what I mean and where the words come from, although you may n't hold with them. I've thought of those words, sir. She bears no more malice than He did."

Betsy paused. Mr. Penstephen had not moved — had not withdrawn his eyes from hers, but, for the term of the last few lowered sentences, it was her eyelids they had rested on, for she herself was looking down at her apron, a bit of the hem of which, as she spoke, she was folding and unfolding with unconscious fingers.

"She's one of the gentle ones," she went on after a moment; "but one of the strong ones, too — one of the enduring ones, that is, the ones that bear things and say nothing about them, so that if you did n't, perhaps, know for yourself what they were suffering, you would n't for them. They'd go on till they dropped, sir." Betsy raised her eyes. "I'm making bold I know — bolder than I ever thought I 'ad it in me. You ought to have seen, sir. It's been there for you to see, and in a manner of speaking you've not so much as looked. Times and again. Time *after* time. Well — my mistress has dropped, sir."

There was a long silence after that.

"You don't spare me," said Mr. Penstephen when at length he broke it.

"I don't want to, sir. My mistress has done that. It's time that you knew — time, if you could n't know otherwise, that somebody told you."

Silence again. Mr. Penstephen came round to her side of the bed. He seemed shaken and unnerved. He pulled a chair forward and sat down, and motioned to Betsy to sit down too.

Betsy would not, however.

"If I ignore my station," she said, "and take upon me to speak out to my master, I'd rather do it standing."

So lately the other scene in this room — the curious scene between mistress and maid, in which as in this, though differently, the barriers of caste had been so arbitrarily set aside. The reflections of Mrs. Penstephen and the weeping Katinka have hardly been wiped out before the hanging looking-glass is shewing this strange picture of Mr. Penstephen and Betsy. . . .

Silence again. Mr. Penstephen sat apparently thinking. He made no attempt to combat what Betsy had said. He seemed to be waiting for what she should say further, she, upon her part, in no hurry to go on. She was waiting, perhaps, for what she had said to soak in.

"You said you were n't alarmed," he reminded her when he spoke next.

"No more am I," said Betsy; "but that's not to say that I shan't be, sir. I've told you that I believe this will pass. I'm sure of it. It will lift like a fog. It's after, sir. You won't lose her now, but if this life goes on — well, hers won't. You'll lose her as sure as I am taking upon me to tell you so."

"What makes you think —"

"Think!" cried Betsy. It was the first time she had raised her voice. "Think! I'm not thinking, sir. I'm knowing. Yes, and I know more. I know why," she lowered her voice again. "She's doing what can't be done. That's the shape of it. What it's not possible for man or woman *to* do, sir."

Mr. Penstephen asked what that was.

"She does n't know it," said Betsy. "She thinks she thinks as you do, sir, — believes, if I may put it like this, that she does n't believe. But I've seen! There was the children's prayers, sir, which you forbade me to teach them — you may remember about that. I *had* taught them as you may recollect. You may have noticed that time; *I* shan't forget. 'Suffer little children' . . . she said. Could there be any 'arm in that? But you would n't have it, sir, — would n't 'ear of it. Very well. It was to be as you wished, and it *was;* then and afterwards. But I remember what I remember, and it was that day that, servant as I am, I held her in my arms. I always knew after that. In a way I had known before, but it came to me then as certain knowledge."

"Betsy, you'll drive me mad," said Mr. Penstephen. "Speak out, woman. What did you know?"

"She's living against her conscience," said Betsy at once.

Half-an-hour later Mr. Penstephen was still there. His candle unheeded was burning itself low in the socket. He was sitting beside the bed, his arms stretched over it, and his head between them. Betsy, her say said, was sitting once more in her own chair. She was very tired now, but had no inclination to sleep. She looked over from time to time at her master.

There were sounds now from the street. The occasional footfall of the labourer going to his work was heard, and the rumble of an early cart. Light had shewn itself for some time round the edges of the curtained windows, and where two of the curtains did not quite meet. Birds were singing. There was the *cheep, cheep*, of sparrows sometimes from the window-sill, and, from somewhere near-by, the recurring chorus of nestlings at the approach of a parent bird with food. Soon the town itself would be waking; soon movements in the house would tell of the rising of the

servants; soon Frau Finkel herself would appear to take Betsy's place by the bed.

Mr. Penstephen clasped his hands above his head, but did not otherwise move. To be near the children's mother seemed to ease him. He, no more than Betsy, was sleeping or even sleepy. After any change of position upon the part of either of the two watchers, stillness settled down upon the room as before.

In the stillness suddenly a slight movement: the turning of the head upon the pillow.

Betsy, on her feet in a moment, met her mistress's eyes.

"Is that you, Betsy?"

Mr. Penstephen started up.

"John?"

He bent over her, kissing her, stroking her hand, murmuring endearments.

She looked then from one to the other; round the room then, and back to their faces.

"But . . ." She was struggling to remember. "Have I been here all the time? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, my darling."

She looked at them doubtingly.

"I've been thinking I was in London. I thought I had bought David a back-gammon board in Regent Street for his birthday. John, are you sure? Betsy?" She searched their faces again. "Surely I did buy it. It has a marbled-paper back — the usual sort of thing — like book-binding, only I chose this particular paper. John, do you mean that I have n't been away at all? I thought I was staying in Half Moon Street. I could shew you the house. The knocker on the door was a dolphin."

They explained to her.

"I could have told you the dress I was wearing — it was my striped linsey, Betsy, and what's more, I did n't find it warm enough."

"The night turned cold between three and four, 'm. I made up the stove."

"What time is it now?"

Betsy looked at her watch.

"But . . ."

Again the long puzzled *But.*

"It was so real. I remember my journey — the crossing. It was smoother when I came back than when I went. I sat on deck coming back. I can see the paddle-boxes now, and the smoke from the funnels — the way it lay on the sea. If this was a dream . . ."

"Just a dream."

He took both her hands in his own, enveloped them with his, uncovered them to look at them and kiss them.

"But you've come back to me," he said huskily. He jerked his head in the direction of Betsy. "She," he said, "promised that you would."

Mrs. Penstephen's eyes, quite clear now, but still questioning, turned to Betsy.

"Dreaming," she said.

"Yes, 'm. But you've done with all that now. Finely you frightened us, 'm, but we shall have you well in no time."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Just under twenty-four hours."

Even now she seemed hardly convinced.

"The paddle-wheels and the smoke on the sea — like smoke from an engine spreading itself on fields. The man who sold me the back-gammon board had spectacles. I should know him again, I can see him now. He was rather tall and stooped a little. I looked at several boards, and chose the one I bought because it reminded me of one which belonged to my father."

"David shall have one like it," Mr. Penstephen said. "We'll choose one together the first day you're able to go out."

"Twenty-four hours!" she said slowly. "And I thought I had been away a week."

She was silent for a minute or so, thinking, taking her

bearings, sifting realities from imaginings. The candle on the table spluttered and went out, and Betsy, hastily putting the extinguisher over its smoking remains, took it out into the passage.

"What I don't remember is why I went," her mistress was saying when she came back into the room. "Of course there was Katinka — I have n't forgotten that — and all that dreadful business —"

"Don't try to remember now, Mary. Would you like anything? Betsy has hot milk for you. Will you have some of that?"

"If I could have some tea —"

"Of course you can, 'm. I've the ætna here. I'll have a cup ready for you in less than five minutes."

"Why, I thought I went, I mean — since I did n't go at all and have just been lying here. Have I had a doctor?"

He nodded.

"I did n't know that. When?"

"Yesterday morning."

He did not say that she had had two, nor speak of the second visit.

"No, I did n't know. How funny David was about the paper-knife — would n't shew his throat if he used it. Have n't you been to bed at all?"

"Oh, yes."

"Betsy?"

"No, Betsy has n't."

"Never you mind about Betsy, 'm. Betsy's done very-well-thank-you, with armchairs and pillows and I don't know what-all. Rested in perfect luckshry, Betsy has. We shall soon have your tea ready, 'm. You fix your mind upon that."

"What is it, my darling?"

She moved her head helplessly upon the pillow.

"I don't know, John. I'm so tired. I think I must have been that journey, I'm so dreadfully tired. Oh," she began to sob weakly. "I don't want to cry. I don't know

what's making me or what's the matter with me. Don't let me cry or I shall be ill again. Oh, John. Oh, Betsy."

It was Betsy to the rescue then, and Betsy who succeeded in calming her — or perhaps even the tea!

CHAPTER XII

FAR-REACHING the results of Mrs. Penstephen's illness — far-reaching, then, if poor Katinka was implicated, the results of the engagement which had been made on the day when the blushing girl had presented herself at Frau Finkel's, and Mrs. Penstephen so apprehensively had acted against what she thought of as her better judgment. This, however, is to look ahead, and the immediate results are all that yet concern us.

These, as Mrs. Penstephen regained her strength, shewed themselves in results of their own.

Betsy went about singing. She was the old Betsy again who was never cross. She devised pleasures for the children: little picnics mostly — their luncheon or their tea taken with them to the woods or the fields, where flowers starred the grass, and butterflies looked so like flying flowers that sometimes it seemed as if the flower you were making for got up and flew away. At these picnics she became a sort of Katinka — finding quaker grasses for their delight, slender nodding things the like of which they had never seen before: or weaving the daisies which they brought her — Georgina's one at a time in a little hot clutching hand — into chains with which she wreathed them and even herself. She might have been decking them all to a bridal.

It would be "This afternoon if you're good and when I've seen to your mamma, we'll go for some more. Yes, we'll take the ætna."

It was the ætna, with Betsy's basket and a paper bag or two to help, which turned a walk into a picnic.

The rooms at Frau Finkel's were full of the flowers they gathered. They brought back great bunches from all such expeditions, and always one bunch composed entirely of white ones.

"Does Mother like white ones best?" David asked when he saw that the white bunch, which Betsy picked herself, was always for his mother.

Betsy smiled.

"I've a fancy that she should have them," she said.

Something was in the air — something that was not only the spring and the imminent summer. The spring was in tune with it, that was all, so that to Betsy the birds seemed to sing rather to her singing — the singing in her heart — than because it was the season for their song. The very grasshoppers, making their happy scratching noises in the warm grass, rejoiced with her and for her.

"What's so nice about the spring is that it comes after the long winter," she said to David.

David pointed out that the winter had not been long.

"Long enough, then," said Betsy; — "and the stalks, talking of length, not quite so short Miss Georgina, dear, if you want me to thread them — long enough, I should say, if, thank God, not too long for its memory to be wiped out all the same now the summer's before us." She contemplated a grasshopper which alighted on her skirt as she spoke. "The 'ead for all the world like a goat's, and the legs like two pairs of step-ladders! And to think they can sing like they do. Rubbin' one leg against the other, as I think I've read somewhere. Well, if any one had ever told me I could feel friendly to a insect . . . !"

Smiles, singings, hummings all the day long. It was Betsy, with hands full enough one would have supposed, who suggested the expedition to Frankfort to see the town and the Zoölogical Gardens. David, who was to bring back the recollection for all time of some fearsome black swine which the Zoölogical Gardens held just then, was, it was plain, to be made to feel that if he had missed his birthday, his birthday had been made up to him — in full measure, too, pressed down, running over!

Mrs. Penstephen, looking strangely like a Madonna, lay propped-up with pillows in her bed. She felt as weak as if

she had had a long illness, but daily she was gaining strength. Her books and her work were beside her, but she would stop reading or working to go into long reveries from which she would emerge with starry eyes. Hardly yet did she seem quite back from her dreamings, when, as Betsy had suggested, her state, since she had had no sense of discomfort in her imagined journey, or at least had brought back none with her to consciousness, must truly have been like that of one who groans under an anæsthetic. No question that her present dreamings were not happy! Peace enveloped her and shone in her expression. Her thoughts were as the long long thoughts of youth, and tinged with no more than youth's happy melancholy.

She spoke of Katinka, sometimes, with solicitude and even affection, but of the Dreadful Business not at all. Well, perhaps, that David said nothing of his glimpse of the ladies connected with that. The peace a fragile thing. If Mr. Penstephen caught sight of them subsequently, as would seem probable, he did not speak of them either. They had played their part, and for the time being were done with. Betsy may have seen them — or, perhaps, may not, for the picnics took her and her charges away from the beaten tracks — but she in any case was far too wise to have alluded to what would have been disturbing. She believed, moreover, that, their work finished, they were indeed thenceforward negligible. No mention of them came to menace the tranquillity of the quiet room, where David's mother lay and rested and dreamed. . . .

Then, for stillness, suddenly movement — that for which Betsy had been waiting. Not marching orders, surely? Betsy? Betsy, who had conceived the idea of the piano for an anchor! Not exactly marching orders; something to do with marching orders for all that. Mr. and Mrs. Penstephen were going away.

We see Betsy, at once, laughing and crying, kissing the children, kissing and kissed by her mistress. We see David's

mother pale, as one who has been ill, but with what David thought of afterwards as the Shining look in her face; and we see David's father going about with a light but determined step and a protecting glance for David's mother. Georgina, if we think of her at all, we may think of as much as usual — just fatly and comfortably complacent. But David, older, observant and sensitive to influences, we see excited and not a little perplexed.

Years before he was to know — years and years as the young count years! His mother and father had been away before — his father often. But this going away was somehow different. They were n't going for very long. Betsy said that; his mother said it. Why was Betsy in such spirits — yet somehow tearful spirits? Not just ordinary spirits. Why did she look at him in — well, the way that she did look at him? His mother looked at him in something of the same way too. He even found his father's eyes fixed contemplatively upon him. After such a look, whichsoever of them it was from whom it came, the looker always smiled. Once, when it was his mother, she turned away her head very quickly, and it was a moment or two before he saw her face. But when he did see it, it was resolutely smiling.

"Why are n't we going too?" he asked.

She did not answer quite at once, and when she did, it was not to answer what he asked.

"Your father thinks that nothing but a change will make me quite well. David, I think he's right."

"But could n't we come with you? Could n't I?"

His mother shook her head.

He persisted.

"But could n't *I?* I should n't have to have Betsy. She could stop with Georgina."

"No, David. But the time will soon pass and we shall come back to you. You 'll be with me really — all the time, every moment. And Georgina too. You're both in my

heart every hour of the day. And we shan't be far off — only Frankfort where you went the other day."

"We could go over and see you."

"Perhaps," said his mother.

"You could come over and see us."

"Perhaps," she said again; but again she shook her head almost at once and said No.

"We shall be back too soon for visits."

Yet every one seemed happy. David, excited by what was in the air or perhaps by Betsy's concrete excitement, was conscious of the joyous feeling, even in himself, but could see no cause for rejoicing.

The day came for his parents to go. That morning the children's mother seemed hardly able to let either of them out of her sight for a moment. It did seem as if there was something special in this going away. It was not David's imagination that made all the circumstances that attended it appear unusual. Even Betsy's packings — and David had so often seen her pack! — were not like the usual packings. Not that much luggage was to be taken. David's father and David's mother, indeed, were taking as little as might be. Something. Something in the way that Betsy laid out and folded her mistress's things . . . Something in the way that she laid them in the trunk . . . Something in the directions that she gave about one particular dress — a new one and, by chance (Providence, Betsy said!), even a grey one . . .

"The gloves you'll have to get, 'm — *in* Frankfort. Now, you won't forget, 'm, will you, and wear what you've got when there's not a pair suitable. White would have done, but you're out of whites by my stupidity. A pearl grey, 'm, remember — the delicate shade. Not too dark, 'm, whatever you do. I've put everything together just as you'll want it. Your shoes and your stockings and the handkerchief separate. One of the lace ones that you've never used."

"Does n't Betsy spoil us all, David?"

"You, 'm? Not much fear of that. Beyond spoiling you are. The kind that can't *be* spoiled, 'm. Yes, Master David, that's the kind that your mamma is."

David's mother laughed.

"You hear that, children?" she said, catching Georgina up into her arms — because it was her girl-child that was of the size that she could lift — "you hear what this bad old Betsy says — that your mother's past spoiling. And I'm not sure that it is n't true. You've all done your best to make it true anyway — she and both of you and your father, David. Your father. Oh, I wonder whether I'm right to let *him?*"

But Betsy only said something more about the gloves and went on with her packing.

Mr. Penstephen was packing his things in his dressing-room. They could hear him moving about — opening and shutting drawers. David, when he looked in, emboldened by circumstances, saw folded clothes on the bed beside an open portmanteau, a pile of shirts upon a chair, and an array of boots and shoes, from which his father seemed to be choosing which he should take with him.

"It's the making up your mind that takes time, my boy. There's no difficulty when you can put in all you've got."

"I know all about that sort of packing," David said. "Everything that 's left over goes into the hold-all."

"That's just it," said his father. "A man and a woman go forth with little more than they stand up in. As it was in the beginning, my son, before the accumulations. No hold-all this little journey."

David wandered round the perplexing room; examined his father's razors and strop; his watch and chain which lay on the dressing-table beside them; his brushes (grown-up ones with ivory backs and no handles), his tortoiseshell combs; the studs and gold links and 'solitaires' and tie-pins on the lacquer tray under the looking-glass. Everything connected with his father was wonderful — much

more mysterious, somehow, than the things connected with his mother.

"Mother's taking her new dress," he said.

His father smiled.

"I should take a new suit myself, if I had one," he said. "Tell your mother that she'll have to put up with me in old clothes."

At the door David heard himself called back.

"Tell her that with my love, David."

And David, returning to his mother, delivered his message. Detached from its context it required explanation. But Betsy saw it at once.

"He means this, 'm," she said and touched the grey dress.

"With his love . . ." said David's mother. "Clothes don't matter, do they, David?"

But what Betsy said was "And to think I shan't be there to dress you!"

The rest was hurry and bustle. In spite of oceans of time the fly came to the door a little before any one was ready. There were writings of labels with one hand, while a key on its ring was shaken from a lock with the other; hurried adjustings of straps; last looks round. The children and Betsy were to see them off. At length all were bundled into the carriage.

Frau Finkel, with Gretchen and Anna behind her, stood on the pavement waving.

"A goot chairney and *auf wiedersehen*, and, if you will permit, goot vishes, — de best vishes."

Something even here . . .

The fly drove off.

"It's as if we was all going," said Betsy. But the aftermath of the hurrying was over the drive, and "Have I got the key of my bonnet-box?" said David's mother.

Nothing was said in the fly. There was talk, but it was of the trivial things of the moment; things they saw as they

passed. The dogs in the little carts were always an inexhaustible topic, and one, who, by his hanging tongue, seemed in need of a drink, was pointed out and discussed most of the way.

"Did you put in my blue veil, Betsy?"

Betsy had done so. A little more it will be seen, than just what the man and the woman stood up in.

Only, near the station: "If either of them was n't well you'd let me know at once."

"Sooner than that, 'm. Make your mind quite easy."

At the station, while David's father was getting the tickets and seeing to the luggage, his mother suddenly drew both her children to her.

"Never love me any less," she said, "either of you. Promise me, David. Promise me, Georgina."

That, with her look as she said it, was what David was always to remember most vividly of the small happenings of that day.

They both promised.

Then the train came in and David's father came back. Leanings from the window; good-byes; last directions.

"And if I was n't forgetting!" said Betsy. "I thought one of these days, if you'd no objection, I'd take them over for the afternoon to Wiesbaden. There might come one when we, who are left behind so to speak, felt we should like a little bit of an extra treat — a sort of fête like, and I thought we'd mark it with a little excursion."

"Yes, yes," cried the children.

Their parents had no objection.

"I shall think of you all, you may be sure," said their mother, "when that day comes."

The train began to move. They waved her out of sight.

On the way home they talked of the projected excursion. David was for having it at once and proposed the next day. But this, it seemed, was not at all Betsy's intention. It was to be kept, she said, for the very last — for something to

look forward to, all the time. Thus it must be on the day before that on which his parents came back.

"That's the day we'll celebrate," she said. "That's the day we'll fix on to keep in our minds. We'll have a special cake for tea and make the day what it will be — a day of rejoicing."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE were days which David was always to remember. The day before his parents came back was one of these; the day which saw them come back was another. The time had passed quickly. The holiday spirit helped, perhaps, for David's lessons had been suspended in his parents' absence, and the ætna and the basket with the paper bags had been a feature of almost every day's walk. Betsy had seemed determined to make the period one of special well-being. So, to the accompaniment of blue skies and unfailing sunshine, the days had slipped by — to the last but one — that set apart by Betsy for Wiesbaden and what she called the Rejoicing.

"Rejoicing," she said, "because your dear papa and mamma come back to us next day."

Betsy proposed, however; the barometer disposed. Nine o'clock saw the rain beginning to fall. Betsy, who had been up at half-past-six, when the morning was almost too beautiful, saw with dismay the clouds begin to gather. She hoped for rain at seven if rain there must be. It became plain that there must be rain. Then let there be showers. Above all let nine o'clock pass drily. The clocks were striking nine when the deluge began.

The odd thing, from David's point of view, was that Wiesbaden which, as the morning went by, shewed itself to be out of the question, hardly seemed to be in Betsy's thoughts at all. She comforted the children mechanically — even a little impatiently. David, smarting with disappointment and reminded of the day when his mother had been taken ill, burst out with "Well, you need n't be cross. It's us that ought to be cross — Georgina and me."

"I'm not cross, Master David. How you can dare to say such a thing! Me doing my best all the time. It's

provoking enough as it is without being called cross, as if I could 'elp the weather. And so would anybody be cross. As if it could n't have rained any other day from morning till night if it had wanted to. It's enough to make a saint cross. Miss Georgina, will you stop licking the window with your tongue and clean pinafore and all. How many times must I tell you?"

The children wanted to go in the rain. They were for the Rejoicing which had been promised them if they had to rejoice wet-foot or soaked to the skin. But "Wiesbaden!" said Betsy contemptuously, and, having herself opened the window to look at the sky, shut it with something like a bang. As if Wiesbaden could n't wait! As if Wiesbaden mattered!

"If it don't stop by twelve," she said, "it can go on for a week."

Well, it did n't stop by twelve. All day long the rain beat upon the windows. David watched the drops. There would be an accumulation of them, and then, one running into another, there would be a sudden slide; a rush down the pane, leaving for a moment or two a course like the course of a river. Then the thing would begin over again. You might speculate on the hazards of the rush. When would it be? Now? or now? It was always sudden when it came and lightning-quick. It reminded David somehow of the telegraph wires, which, when the exact moment struck, swung downwards as suddenly. Up, up, up, down; splash, splash, splash, collapse, cascade, what you will! He saw an analogy but could not have defined it.

Tea brought a measure of solace. There was honey, and the cake which had been promised. Betsy had sent out for the cake. It was not, she said, quite what she had wished for, but it had sugar on the top of it, and it was, as far as it could be, what she called Special. She cheered up a little at tea-time and ceased to be what the children meant by 'cross.' She said, "We could n't have got what I really

meant, even in England, because of having to buy a whole one. They're very big, you know, with sugar ornaments — though they do say some of that's plaster of Paris. But we could have got a very good substitute in any good pastry-cook's. Well, we're lucky to have this such a wet day, and no one to choose it who knew."

"Who knew what?" asked David.

"Oh, about cakes," said Betsy — "English cakes. There's cakes and cakes. Birthday cakes and Bride's cakes and Christening cakes. What's fit for one is n't fit for another. Birthday cakes have candles, and Bride's cakes or Wedding cakes have almond under the sugar — very unwholesome, of course — and Christening cakes . . . well, I'm sure I don't know, though of course there is such a thing. All white, I expect. Now, if this had been Bride's cake, do you know what we should all have had to do?"

Neither David nor munching Georgina knew.

"Why, each put a little bit of it under our pillows to dream on."

"Dream on?" said David.

Betsy laughed.

"It's supposed to make you," she said.

David, who knew something of the properties of things that were said to disagree with you, thought perhaps that was the almond, and Betsy said perhaps so; but it was decided that an experiment should be made with this cake which had none. Three little morsels found their way under three pillows that night. It is not on record that any one dreamt anything — unless Georgina's alleged dream that she had eaten hers in the night (when it had certainly disappeared) could be said to count. A rite, however, in connection with the cake had been performed, and served in its turn to mark the day.

Something else was to mark it. These were the days when a telegram was an event, and threw the recipient into a condition of apprehension if not of active alarm. It was ill news to some purpose which flew apace then. You kept

good tidings for letters and only resorted to the electric telegraph to tell of deaths or other disasters. Betsy could have counted on her ten fingers the telegrams that had come to her employers in all the years spent in their service. It was very natural, then, that a telegram which arrived soon after tea, and, unlike a mere letter, was brought to the room by Frau Finkel herself, should cause flutterings. Betsy with a startled face took it from its portentous bearer. Her first thought was, of course, that it was from Frankfort to say that something had happened to her master or mistress. To her relief, however, she saw that it was addressed to Mr. Penstephen. She turned it over and over in her hands, examining it, and wondering then whether or not she ought to open it. Frau Finkel stood waiting, discussing fors and againsts, but shewing, as Betsy saw, a decided bias. Frau Finkel was for opening — which was, in the end, perhaps, what turned the scale. Betsy abruptly put the envelope down upon the table beside her and took up her work.

And yet — Frau Finkel urged, and paused significantly.

Betsy threaded her needle. The master would be back in the morning — in the afternoon at latest. The message, whatever it was, must wait.

"But if important," said Frau Finkel, "it should maybe be telegraphed on. Always am I anxious vid a telegram. So urgent often —"

Betsy shook her head.

"Nothing could be done at this hour. My master and mistress shall have their quiet evening."

Frau Finkel raised her eyebrows and her shoulders.

"You know best," she said, "but if it was me I should be anxious."

Which was precisely what Betsy was. She had been relieved of her first dreadful fear, but she had been startled. She put the telegram against the clock and went quietly on with her work. But from that moment, like the shipwrecked saint and his companions, she wished for the day.

So it came that the hours were marked. Something, for David, lay behind all that happened or did not happen. It would be too much to say that apprehension had any part in his feelings, but he had seen the momentary apprehension of Betsy, who still looked at the envelope from time to time; and David, cheated again of promised pleasures, depressed by the weather, and conscious always of the feelings of those about him, was disturbed. An unusual day, somehow, the day before the return of his parents.

They arrived in the morning. Betsy had not known the hour at which to expect them, or she would have taken the children to meet the train. A fly drew up at Frau Finkel's about noon — just after the three had come in from their walk. David saw it from the window, and was out of the room and on the stairs before Betsy knew what had happened. She followed with Georgina.

"My darling boy, and Georgina, and Betsy too," David's mother, happy tears in her eyes, — these the days of tears — clung to them all. She released the children to let them go to their father and then caught them to her again.

"And Betsy Prig," she said laughing and crying, "and Betsy Prig."

It was some moments before the concourse of persons left the passage; then, Frau Finkel, who had run up to receive and welcome her patrons, having gone back to her kitchen to expedite luncheon, all mounted the stairs, each carrying something, and the servants following with the heavier luggage. In the sitting-room the embracings were gone through again. Betsy saw that her mistress looked years younger.

"And so well, 'm — quite different from when you went away, though you were better then, of course. Worlds better now, does n't she, sir?"

Mr. Penstephen nodded amiably, and Mrs. Penstephen said, "Do I, Betsy?"

Betsy, gazing at her, gave a little exclamation.

"There's something — why —" She broke off and looked again, "I declare! If you have n't done your own hair the new way, 'm! The way I wanted to do it for you!"

Her mistress met her eyes, laughing.

"Successfully?"

"If you'll take your hat off, 'm, I shall be able to judge."

Mrs. Penstephen removed her hat, and Betsy clasped her hands in approval.

"Not," she said, "but what I shan't be able to do it better for you than that, 'm, though wonderfully and well, considering."

Mrs. Penstephen laughed again, happily, and turned once more to her children.

"And have you been good both of you? Not troublesome? And have you missed your parents? Glad to have your father and mother back, David?"

"There's a telegram for Father," said David.

At once his mother's face clouded.

"A telegram?" she said.

"If I was n't forgetting," said Betsy, and fled to fetch it.

A check on the happiness. The strange property of a word! David was conscious of something. There was something even in the way that his father waited. . . .

Betsy came back with the envelope, and, while her master opened it, told of her perplexities. She ended with "So I did nothing, and hope I did right, sir."

There seemed to be a long pause. Betsy called Georgina to her and retied her sash which was loose. Mr. Penstephen read the message and read it again. David, in one of the rather wriggly attitudes of young boyhood, watched every one — saw how his mother searched his father's face, saw that his father's face told nothing, saw that Betsy was almost pretending to be occupied with Georgina. He was too well-brought-up, or too much in awe of his father, to ask questions, but he hoped to know what the telegram said.

"No bad news?" came at last from his mother.

For a moment his father did not answer. Then he put the paper into her hands, and watched her absently as she read its message.

"John," she said at length. "Poor things! How dreadful."

But it was the sort of 'dreadful' that you employed in reference to calamities which happened to other people. Betsy breathed again. Even David was conscious that tension was relaxed.

"Oh, poor, poor things!" said his mother again, and then a very curious look came into her face. She got up and went over to David's father, ignoring David who was now saying, "What, Mother? What, Mother?"

"Good gracious, John," she said; "this will make —"

"Yes," he said shortly.

Betsy rose now from her kneeling position beside Georgina, and called softly to the children to follow her from the room. They both demurred, but Betsy was quietly insisting when Mrs. Penstephen, appearing to remember, turned to her, and put the telegram into her hand, as, a moment or two before, Mr. Penstephen had put it into her own.

Betsy, while David still said, "What, Mother?" half under his breath, read it, looked at her and read it again.

"Dear, dear, 'm. How dreadful. The two of them. How terrible." And then her face in turn underwent a change. She looked from one to the other and flushed suddenly to the eyes. "But this'll — why, father and son — then the Master's . . ."

She broke off and used what David, clamouring now to be told, thought the most extraordinary expression. For, labouring under considerable excitement and apostrophising his mother with Ohs of wonder and surprise, she breathed a tentative but unmistakeable and even jubilant M' lady. His mother hushed her down at once, but it was quite plain that something significant had happened.

CHAPTER XIV

It was some moments before David, strung up now to a pitch of excited expectancy, which, in the unusualness of all the existing conditions, found voice rather unrestrainedly, could get an answer to his breathless questions. When it came, it was, he thought, disappointing. He had looked to share the emotions of his elders. He only learned that two people were dead. To be sure, they had died in tragic circumstances — by misadventure: the overturning of a sailing boat somewhere unnamed in the telegram. But he knew neither of them. He was not thrilled. He had hardly known that his cousins Sir Joseph Penstephen and his son Edward were alive till he heard that they were dead. No, at first he was not thrilled. The telegram told nothing but the meagre facts. "Letter follows" was its promise, but letter had not followed yet.

But as he saw the concern of his parents and of Betsy, — the odd effect which the news had upon them, — his curiosity was wakened afresh. His mother had grown very grave, and his father was absently looking out of the window. Betsy's expression now was frankly triumphant. Her mistress's 'Hush, Betsy,' had not abashed her. His mind jumped back to the term she had employed.

Why had Betsy who (slurring one vowel) always called his mother, 'm, called her m' lady (slurring another)?

Questions thereupon tripped themselves upon his tongue. They were parried or unanswered. The time, it seemed, was not yet.

All the rest of that day mystery was in the air. As these were the days when telegrams were events, so were they days when the young were not lightly taken into the confidence of their elders. Betsy, even, kept her own counsel,

though she hinted at possible changes. She danced Georgina to the ceiling — an exercise which, in view of Georgina's size and weight, she only performed when her spirits were at their highest. She overflowed with good-humour, sang to herself, and broke off in her singing to say, "There'll be mourning, of course. I expect you'll both have to go into black."

"What for?"

"Your cousins, of course, — first once-removed and second, I suppose they'd be, but near relations for all that. Sir Joseph was your papa's first cousin."

David had lived too much abroad not to know about mourning. Visions of crêpe-clad families rose before him — French chiefly — companies of persons garlanded with the trappings of woe. A very welter of crêpe!

"But we've never —" he began. He had lost relations before.

This, Betsy said, was different.

It soon became apparent that this was indeed different — that everything was different, and that things were going to be even more different still. His reluctant mother, it seemed, was really 'my lady,' and his father had amazingly become 'Sir John.' His mother at length explained to him.

Then came the letter. It added little, materially, to the information contained in the telegram. The accident had happened off the west coast of Ireland. The boat had been upset by a sudden squall. The bodies of Sir Joseph Penstephen, his son, and a boatman, had been recovered the next day. The bodies of the first two had been conveyed to England and were to be buried in the family vault at Ettringham. David's father consulted time-tables, but found he could not by any means be in time for the funeral; and here was 'differentness' at once. There had never been any talk, any remotest suggestion, of his attending the funeral of a relation before.

Excitement now seized all but one. It was as if Betsy's excitement had infected the rest of the household. Betsy had started it, as David the attack of measles which had presently spread to Georgina. But measles had stopped at Georgina, and excitement ran, like a cold in the head, through the house, and extended itself beyond the house to the tradespeople and others. Only while every one else was excited, — even in a contemptuous sort of way, David's father, — his mother remained grave. Almost one might have supposed her frightened.

And in some subtle way which David did not understand, in his mother's graveness as in the excitement of the others, the recent absence of his parents seemed linked to the news which had greeted them on their return. Betsy's excitement, most of all, seemed to be the outcome of the one in connection with the other. David caught scraps of what was said. According to Betsy the order of things had been Providential — not the actual order either, for Sir Joseph and his son were dead before . . . (whatever Betsy may have meant!), but the seeming order. There would have been the delay if . . . Besides which it would have looked so strange. Whereas . . . No, things could n't have worked out better. Providential. There was no other word.

Questioned afterwards by David upon these unfinished and enigmatic droppings, she said, "Oh, well, it would n't have looked very seemly for your papa and mamma to go away after they heard the sad news, would it?"

David conceded that it would not, but he suspected a parry in Betsy's answer (the more so that Betsy looked as if she thought she had got out of something rather cleverly), and remained, as for many years he was to remain, mystified and a little restive under his mystification. It was as if he did not ask — did not know how to ask — the right sort of questions.

When his father went to England, as he did the next day after the arrival of the letter, the feeling of excitement did

not cease. His mother gave herself up to the three in the nursery — had her meals with them, walked with them when they went out, played with them, sang with them, read to them. But were they refuge to her from her thoughts? David was to ask himself that, later. The graveness would lift from her face and she would laugh, as she had laughed on the day of her return before she had heard of the telegram. But always the grave look would come back. Yet, in spite of it, excitement was in the air . . .

There was open talk of England now. No wonder there was excitement. To David, as to Betsy, England stood for the Promised Land. Every now and then David's mother would say, "I don't know yet how it will be"; or, "If we do settle to go back." But, "Yes, Yes, Yes," David would protest at once, and, "Yes, Yes, Yes," Georgina would echo, and the talk would be allowed to play round England.

"It'll mean school for you presently," his mother would remind him by way of warning, if for a moment she allowed herself to be infected by their spirit. An English school, however, and David did n't care.

Letters began to come from his father — long letters, bits of which his mother read to him, and other bits of which she read to Betsy.

"It will be England," she said one day, and called David to her and kissed him.

From that day it seemed no time to the day when, all preparations having been made, boxes packed, bills paid, the piano sent back to the shop, the family gathered itself up and said good-bye to Homburg.

There were *Auf wiedersehens* and shakings of hands. The speeding of the children's parents so lately had but foreshadowed this larger speeding. Half the street turned out to see them go, and at the station was Katinka who kissed and was kissed and wept.

"You come again," Frau Finkel had said, and "You come again," now said Katinka.

She had brought flowers for her mistress, fruit for the children, and a handkerchief for Betsy.

"I shall never forget you," David heard his mother say to her. "If I ever do come back, Katinka, it will be because you have helped to make me sorry to go. I leave a friend behind me, I know."

Katinka could not answer. She turned to Betsy.

"Sometimes you write to me, Fräulein Betsee."

"Yes, indeed she will," said David's mother.

And so the family left Homburg.

David's father was to meet them at Dover, and there, sure enough, he was, in unfamiliar black, when the Calais boat came alongside. They were going to London where he had taken lodgings for them.

He espied them and waved to them from the quay.

"Fancy, David, home!"

But the words were spoken so low that David hardly heard them. He was wedged tight in a crowd of luggage-laden passengers. His mother was beside him and, just behind her, Betsy with Georgina by the hand. People's umbrellas and sticks dug him in the ribs. The holland-covered box, part of the burden of one of the sailors, was at his elbow. The hold-all and the valise, borne by another sailor, were occasionally visible as the crowd moved. Difficult to attend!

Presently they were ashore, and David heard the word again. His father spoke it to his mother as he greeted her.

"Welcome home, Mary."

Betsy said it too, docking it of a letter.

"'Ome at last," was what she said.

But his mother looked stricken.

Then the novelty of everything seized David's attention and held it. There were trains, there were porters, there was luggage, but everything looked different and no one seemed to be angry. He heard English on all sides of him

and his heart leapt. In a sort of dream as it seemed to David (and perhaps to his mother) they drew in time to London. In a sort of dream they rattled to their lodgings. In a sort of dream they had their first English meal, and went to their English beds.

Long after the children had fallen asleep their parents sat talking.

"You're not sorry about Ettringham, Mary?"

He was not to have the place. That went, for her life at least, to the dead man's widow.

As if it were that!

"No, John. I'm glad. It would have been an embarrassment to me. How should I manage a large house? It was a relief to me to know that I should n't have to."

"We'll find a house." He did so want her to be happy. "London, perhaps. We'll see how we like it. We shall be considerably better off. There was Penstephen money that Joseph could not leave away."

David's mother, who had flagged during the later stages of the journey and now looked really ill, made an effort to respond, and, trying to think of something to say which should not voice her deadly anxiety, asked about Lady Penstephen.

"Susan? Oh, *she's* well provided for."

"I did n't mean that." She roused herself. "Was it dreadful? Is it going to be?"

"How, dreadful? Oh, her attitude. No, not dreadful at all. She was putting a great restraint upon herself I could see, but she was quite civil." He paused and smiled. "It had been a shock to her, all the same, to hear we were married. I could see that, too. She looked forward, I think, to not being able to receive you."

"She can still refuse, John."

"No, Mary. She is going to receive you. She thinks it her duty, I believe."

Mary Penstephen fell into reverie.

Was anything changed? — actually? Lady Penstephen, who could n't have received her before, could receive her now. She would be pointed at still, of course, pointed out, talked about, but she was no longer outside the law and could be met on sufferance. How strange it all was. David's father proceeded.

"We're to stay there, presently," he said. "If you will — if, that is, I can prevail upon you to come. Susan is to be seen receiving you. The world is to know that she does receive you. The odd thing is that the ridiculous woman means well."

"Is she ridiculous?"

"I think so. But I think you'll have to go, Mary. She does so genuinely believe that she will be doing the right thing. She will be too. That's what makes *it* ridiculous."

But he wished her to go.

"Oh, I'll go, John."

As if she would not do anything to please him. He had done so wonderful a thing for her — if, in view of an awful possibility, so disastrous. Was not his act a negation of his whole life? Yet he had not hesitated. She would do anything — even try to be happy. He still did not ask her what ailed her, for he knew, or thought he knew. Was there not that which neither of them had said, though each knew that the other must have thought of it? Impossible that the unspoken thing should have escaped either of them. Even Betsy, determined as she was to see nothing but good in the family's changed fortunes, must have come face to face with it in the first five minutes of her excitement.

He tried to distract her thoughts with talk of the future. Years, after all, were long. He himself comparatively young. He went back to the question of the house. The first thing to do, or one of the first things, was to settle where they wished to live. There was all England to choose from — all the world for that matter — but actually all England.

"For we've finished with the Continent," he said, hoping to please her.

But it seemed to her, looking back across the present dread anxieties, that the years of the wandering had been not unhappy years.

"There are places I shall want to see again," she said, partly to gain time. "Oh, a great many. I shall certainly want to go back some day to Homburg."

Yes, Homburg had treated her well. Homburg had made her happy, if it had also dealt her its blow and made her very unhappy.

"We'll go back some day to Homburg."

It was no use. The talk languished. There was a long pause.

"John, I'm so frightened," she said at last.

He took her hand in his. The thing had to be spoken, then? Better, perhaps, that it should be.

"Yes," he said. "David. I know."

But he did not know, and the knowledge that he did not and that she had to tell him, froze what she had been about to say on her lips. He was silent for a moment or two, gently pressing the hand he held. There was so little that he could say that would avail anything.

"Mary, we could not have foreseen." He had to take refuge in that. These wretched little dignities that had so complicated things! What could have been unlikelier than that he should ever succeed? "We just did not know. We have to remember that we could n't have known. Nothing 's changed really, though everything seems to be."

He looked at her, questioning her with his eyes, but she did not speak.

"I don't withdraw from anything that I have held," he said then. That was a challenge.

But still she did not speak. She could not or would not tell him whether or not she withdrew.

"Our children," he heard himself saying, "were born

outside no laws except the arbitrary laws of men's making. They were born in wedlock, Mary, whatever men may say, or may say that wedlock means. You've only to look at them to know that — love-children in the truest sense of an ill-used word — love-children, as all children should be. Is n't it so, Mary?"

She nodded to that.

"Oh, in that sense, yes."

But she gave him no help. She hardly knew, herself, what she thought. All that she knew was that if she had had her life over again, nothing — no love, no passion, no faith even — would have induced her to do what she had done.

"What then, Mary?"

She wanted her hands to put over her eyes, but he held one of them and she would not draw it away. She bent her head over the hand that was free and buried her face in the hollow of her wrist.

"Our marriage," she said at last.

He thought he had not heard her aright.

"It's as if by protecting ourselves we had pushed David further outside the law than he was before. Oh, he is outside it, John, whatever we tell ourselves. You and I know, perhaps, but who else? And I've defeated my own purpose. It was n't all for my own peace of mind. I'd been wretched, I know, but it was n't only for myself. It was because they were outside. I thought that people would forget in time. I thought that when it could n't be said any longer that we were defying opinion —" She broke off. He pressed the hand he held more tightly. "And they would have forgotten. In time the four of us would have been taken for granted. But now it will always be remembered against David that he can't succeed you. And, oh, John, it may be worse than that — much, much worse." She raised her head and met his eyes in a long look. "I've been afraid for some days," she said. "I'd been ill — I might have been mistaken. But now I'm almost sure."

There was a longer pause than before. The breath

seemed to go out of her body, and it was in a voice that was scarcely audible that she spoke next.

"If it's a boy, John, I hope I shall die."

So David's mother in the wretched night that should have been so happy.

But David slept dreamlessly, to wake in the morning to new and wonderful adventure — the adventure of unexplored England.

CHAPTER XV

THESE, then, were the circumstances in which the strangely placed family landed on the shores of England. Small wonder if the heart of one of them was heavy with dread.

It was now, however, that the influence of David made itself felt. For to him the adventure of England was stupendous — the adventure of London — and, infecting his mother with his young excitement at a time when every influence mattered, he may be said perhaps to have saved her. Impossible, though skies were to fall to-morrow, to be with David in London to-day and give way to despondency. She suffered herself to fall under the spell of his rapture. England. London. His wildest dream. He had fervour enough for them both.

Yes, for David at least the adventure was immeasurable. It began with what he thought of as the differentness — difference a word that would not in the least have expressed what he meant! — quite different bread; quite different rooms and furniture; quite different windows; quite different sights to be seen through them: carriages, carts, people. It went on to the shops, taking everything else on its way. There was a grocer's, for instance, where it chanced that his mother bought tea the day after the arrival. No buying of tea had been quite like this. First two separate papers, an inner and an outer, were spread upon the counter. Then a canister from a row of canisters was lightly swung down and held beneath the salesman's right arm, while with his left hand he twisted off the most beautifully fitting lid. Then scales which hung on a little pulley overhead were drawn downwards, the weighing rapidly but very accurately accomplished — a little more, a little less, still a little less — the tea poured from the scales on

to the papers waiting to receive it, the scales, one inside the other now, sent flying back to mid air where they swung themselves to gradual repose, the lid clapped on to the canister, the canister hoisted ever so lightly back to its place in the row of canisters; and the process of the wrapping up began. Fascinating, absorbing, the process of the wrapping up — from the preliminary indentation made with the finger in the exact middle of the pyramid, to the moment when, the rituals of the folding, the propping on one end, the smoothing, the turning over, the refolding, having all been gone through in undeviating order — David was witness to the processes on numberless occasions — the salesman, who from being just the 'man at the tea counter' became in course of time Mr. King and was waited for if he was serving other customers, snapped the string with a sudden jerk, put the parcel down beside others, and, leaning deferentially forward, waited the name and the nature of what was then always called the Next Article.

And all this against an engaging background of neat purple rectangular parcels containing white sugar, and neat blue triangular ones containing brown!

Or the day's shoppings would take these great adventurers to a draper's, and David would see such commonplace things as buttons become wonderful because they were sewn on to enchanting sheets of gold or of silver; to remind him of the golds and the silvers of Grimm. Or he would see ribands that were rolled on large reels or even cardboard wheels, from which, the 'matching' being effected, they would be rapidly pulled in lengths till enough lay upon the counter to allow of the measuring. One, two, three — three and a half yards: snip! then, wind, wind, wind, from thumb to little finger, the hand moving like a shuttle, and it is time in turn for the draper's And the Next Article! (A confusion of ideas at this period left David, hearing of many things for the first time in his life, with a vague impression that, of conceivable or at any rate likely articles, there were exactly thirty-nine!)

Or he would see the coloured borders, not meant to be used, which finished-off the blackest of black silks; or the brilliant arabesques that ornamented a mere label. Nothing was too trivial to be interesting. There were sights, there were sounds, there were rituals. There was something to be got, if you were receptive, from the mere way in which the flat rolls of silk or calico or flannel, or what was comprehensively known as Material, were flopped down on to the counter, and flopped over and over in the unrolling; from (again) the measuring — so many rapid loopings from end to end of the marked yard at the back of the counter; from the ultimate exquisite horror of the tearing. Yes, even the draper's shop yielded its secrets (which were its mysteries) to the enthralled little boy.

And there were secrets which were mysteries waiting for him everywhere — in the streets, in the parks, in the grey river. . . .

Thus, you see, and thus, so that, through David, devouring London with wide eyes, his mother was induced or even obliged to keep hold on life at a time when her grasp was like to have been relaxed. No uncertainty presently. The thing was decreed; and David, supporting her, strengthening her, contributed, as she in darker moments, we may be sure, did not fail to perceive, to the well-being of that potential life which some day might shadow his own. . . .

But it would not shadow his own. The worst was to be spared her. She was sure of it. As she became accustomed to the idea of what had filled her with such dismay, so did the conviction grow with her that, in this at least, the fates would prove compassionate. Her spirits recovered themselves. She sang "Il segretto per esser felice" to the yellow-keyed piano in the drawing-room. Her child — oh, this would be granted to her if nothing else in all her life! — would be a girl.

Meanwhile, with the shoppings and sight-seeings, were house-huntings; a visit to the Depository in Baker Street, where, all these years, the furniture with which they had started what she always thought of as their married life, had been stored; visits to dealers; a sale or two — a very busy husband. Then a house having been found (in Cheyne Walk) and given over to plumbers, painters, and paper hangers, and August by this being half through, a sojourn of some weeks at the seaside. In October came the move in, and after that a month or so of the process known as settling down. Their Christmas dinner — they had always bowed so far to convention as to have one — was eaten, in no picnic fashion, amongst their own household gods, each now in its place.

Peace again; the fear strangely lulled; Mary, perhaps, in the dream which was David's. Peace, anyway; a home for her children; passive days of waiting. Afterwards she looked back on these days with wonder. The house occupied her. That she should have one — and in England! Perhaps she might always have had one? Perhaps Betsy had been right about London, where you did not indeed know so much as the names of your neighbours. No, marriage had made a difference — or was it only that she no longer looked for the averted eye or the more deadly stare? If so the change was in herself. But though she knew presently that the change was indeed partly in herself, she saw very plainly that marriage had made a very considerable difference. The leper cleansed, no longer the heralding cry, but no longer, also, the anticipative parting of the crowd. What taint remained was retrospective. . . .

There were clear shining frosty days that winter. You came in from your walk to cheerful firelit rooms. There was often rime on the trees. There came a very cold spell, and blocks of ice floated down the river. The windows were for the river; the river and its craft for the windows. David

never tired of watching the barges. And after the cold spell, a warm. The ice disappeared, and the gulls, which came inland for shelter, went back to the sea; but there were always the boats and the barges; always the long windows through which to see them. Except when the fogs came, and the fogs came too; and David liked even the fogs.

Here Betsy applauded him. She was proud of them. "Something they can't do," she said, "in your Frances and Italies. Just nasty wet mists when *they* try. These are fogs. There's fogs here that you would n't believe not if I was to tell you. I'm London born and I know."

The fogs with the rest. And all the time things going on out of sight — in the womb of time, in the womb of the sleeping earth. The first snowdrops presently, for outward and visible sign; the first crocus.

David's father came and went. The servants said, Yes, Sir John, and No, Sir John, and hurried to do his bidding. David's mother, smiling a little to herself, believed in her heart of hearts that he liked it. She could smile over this little weakness as yet. He had spoken of his tuppenny 'handle' — the tuppenny honours which his cousins' death had conferred upon him — but she could see that he found such honours easy. She was well content, and saw him go backwards and forwards, as we say, between Cheyne Walk and Ettringham without misgiving. Her own visit had not been paid yet — at first because house-hunting and settling in had made it difficult to arrange, and then for other reasons. It would be best now to wait till after — well, till she should be quite strong again. Meanwhile Susan, whom she could never think of otherwise than as Lady Penstephen — the real Lady Penstephen — had written and had written kindly.

So time went on. She was well; she was ailing; she was well. On the whole she was well. It was when she was not well that the dark moments came in which the fixed idea

which was sustaining her seemed not fixed at all. At such moments if her eyes fell on David they would be full of a very frenzy of remorse. Years afterwards David recalling such a look comprehended it.

A dame-school now for David, who forthwith grew and expanded, adding new words to his vocabulary. His mother, in view of his history and his somewhat unusual bringing-up, had some qualms as to what might lie in store for him, but he fitted quite comfortably into his niche, and nothing of any importance happened to make his tenure of it insecure or to make her uncomfortable. Some trifling difficulties arose in connection with his religious teaching, but a few concessions on both sides, his parents' and that of the lady who kept the school (and who Sir Johned David's father, and Lady Penstephened his mother, almost as much as the obsequious servants) brought matters to an amicable agreement. David might 'learn' what was called Divinity, but must have no dogmatic instruction. His music lesson — Miss Doubleday with the pink fingers — was made to clash conveniently with the inconvenient half hour. Such things could generally be arranged.

But every time John came back from Ettringham, Mary was conscious of some little modification of his attitude toward the world he had professed to despise. He no longer spoke of Susan as ridiculous. She upon her part seemed to have reconsidered him. Circumstances in connection with the settlement of the estate had at first necessitated his presence two or three times at Ettringham, and she had got into the way of relying upon his advice. Insensibly he slipped into the position which, in less unusual conditions, would naturally have been his, as her nearest male connection. He had hated his own family and had lumped her in with it. He was inclined, perhaps, to believe that he had done her an injustice! Mary saw the change come gradually, and still saw nothing in it to alarm her.

Her dream held her. The time was getting near now. A girl child. Another Georgina. What stores of love she had waiting for her — love that would be the greater in that it could never rival the love which she had for David her first-born. Her heart was large enough for the precious three that had made up her world hitherto. It would be large enough for this fourth.

"Betsy, she'll have my David's eyes, and she'll be round and soft and firm too, like my little Georgina."

"If she's like her mother she'll have all the eyes and all the figure she need have. And she will be."

"No, she'll have her father's figure. She'll be tall later — soft and round at first. Sometimes I see her quite clearly. I can't tell you whether she's dark or fair."

"I should like her to be very fair, m' lady. And yet again I don't know. Neither one nor the other, 'm, perhaps. She'll be a beauty whichever it is. Not a doubt about that."

This sort of talk; not a word of a man child. Nor was it foolishness on the part of David's mother. It was a species of faith — a blind belief that, in this supreme instance, the powers that be would not fail her. It was as if she had been promised a daughter, as the Mary of Maries had been promised a Son. And so to within a day or two of the child's birth. Then at the last, at the eleventh hour, her heart failed her. No one knew or could know — she as little as the least concerned. In vain that Betsy kept her bolstering attitude. In vain that she pleaded the long months of unshaken — scarcely shaken — conviction. Incomprehensible now the feeling of security which had sustained her. She had cried peace to herself when there had been no peace. What had she to go upon? Nothing. True she had believed that the being who came to be David would be a boy. And Georgina — she had hoped for a girl when Georgina was born. But what were these but idle guessings? You must be right or wrong. She had chanced to be right. No, the hazards were appalling. She felt as if she had been trapped or betrayed or overtaken. And while

she had slumbered time had gone steadily on. There was nothing that she could have done, yet she felt as if every moment she had spent calmly had been a moment lost.

"What am I to do, Betsy? What am I to do?"

"Don't excite yourself, m' lady. Oh, it'll be all right. You'll see."

"Ah, you mean whatever happens," said her mistress. "And it can't be — don't you see, either of you? You, Betsy, or Sir John? If it's a boy there's David . . . It must be a girl, and it won't be. Oh, I know that now, and I've deceived myself all these months."

The doctor was warned that night and the nurse was installed before the morning. Anxiety then, a hushed house, a room to be passed on tiptoe. Straw presently in the road outside — most surprising straw which Georgina at least would have liked to play in.

Horrible anxiety; mysteries; terrors. Then an announcement more surprising to the children than even the straw. They — and somehow particularly David (as it seemed to David) — had a little brother.

Was that, David asked, why his mother had been ill?

Yes, that, it seemed, after the briefest pause on the part of Betsy, *was* why his mother had been ill. But she was better, and, please God, was very soon going to be well. Later in the day David was allowed to peep at her and at his baby brother. His mother whispered something to him, but so low that he did not hear it.

THE SECOND BOOK OF DAVID

BOOK THE SECOND

CHAPTER I

CHANGES after that. You could n't quite say what they were — just changes. It was from then that David, as it seemed to him later, began his growing up. Looking back he would have said off-hand that there had been little interval before he was at school in earnest, but, as he did not leave his dame-school till he was eleven, nearly three years must have passed before this change came for him. Changes for all that — odd little indefinable things. Betsy becomes dim at this point. There was always something in her arms. Betsy's arms were not less open to David or Georgina, but Johnny was there you see already. Also David himself had less need of them. Georgina, encased in comfortable fat and now boldly growing, had always been self-sufficing. David's father was certainly changing. That had something to do with Johnny, who had the same importance in his eyes as in the eyes of the impressed and impassioned Betsy. The person who was not changed was David's mother. She loved Johnny, but he did not fill her arms somehow as he filled Betsy's. David, quite unaware that he needed solace of any sort soever, found and provided solace there.

Then a notable sign of change — for David's mother. David, even if he had known of it, would not have grasped its significance. It was after one of the visits to Ettringham that David's father spoke, out of a fidgety silence. Silences were not usually fidgety with David's father. He had something to say and presently said so.

"Yes, John."

He was intent upon the newspaper which he was folding and unfolding, or he would have seen that she looked at him curiously.

"It's about Baby."

"Yes, dear."

He did not speak for a moment or two, and then Mary spoke for him.

"You want to have him baptised."

"Mary!" he said; and then, as she looked at him, "How did you know?"

"I don't know," she said. "I just did know."

There was silence again after that — a silence no longer fidgety (he had put down the paper), yet not quite tranquil.

"Susan was talking to me. You know how she would regard this —"

"Yes. How every one would regard it. Not only Susan."

"She more than most people. Yes, she more than most. It's bred in the bone with her — part of her. It's such a little thing."

"Is it, John?"

"Well, to us. To her it's a very big thing. Do you think we might please her?"

"There are godparents," Mary said. "What about godparents?"

"We discussed that. She offered to stand godmother herself."

"And the godfathers? A boy has two."

"Well, that was a difficulty. I told her I would n't ask any of my relations. She said she would undertake to find me godfathers."

"One might like to know something of one's child's godparents."

"Oh, she had General Burke in her mind, I fancy, from what she said. He's known me all my life. He's a neighbour. And she spoke of Archdeacon Eversley who is a very old friend of the family."

Archdeacons; old friends; the return to the fold was uncompromising.

"It's just Baby?"

"How do you mean?"

"She did n't speak of David and Georgina?"

"Their names did n't come up."

"Their souls should be as precious, John, from her point of view, if . . ."

She did not finish.

"She was talking of Baby."

"It's different too, is n't it?" There was the first note of bitterness in her voice that he had perhaps ever heard there — if, indeed, he heard it now.

"You see it's the usual thing. She asked me when it was to be? She took it for granted, you see. It was when I hesitated —"

"You did hesitate."

"I was taken a little unawares."

Mary finished the work she had in hand — she was darning a hole in one of David's stockings — and put it away.

"Yes, John," she said. "I don't know that I have any objection."

"Thank you, Mary."

She saw that he thanked her for raising no difficulty in pleasing Susan.

"John," she said, more in her own voice, "what about David and Georgina — ?"

He had been about to go out of the room — perhaps with the intention of writing to Susan at once. He paused at the door.

"If Baby," she said, "why not they?"

There was no reason except — yes, there was a reason. Baby would be christened in the usual course. Baby was so many weeks old. But David and Georgina. Now and here? Would it not be raking up the whole thing over again? There were the servants. There was any one at all who might see or might hear.

Mary said no more.

David's father wrote to Susan that night. The answer to his letter came to Mary.

Might not, Lady Penstephen wrote, the christening take place at Ettringham, and would not Mary pay her the long-deferred visit now? Would not Mary and John give her this pleasure? Mary, from her place behind the tea-urn, handed him the letter in silence.

"Will you, Mary?"

"Yes, John, of course."

"She speaks of next week. Can you be ready by then?"

"I can be ready at once."

"Then write and say Monday. It will please her that we should choose the earliest day. We'll go from Monday to Thursday. That will leave us Friday and Saturday if we want to stay on. Betsy can be ready, I suppose?"

"Betsy will be ready. She'll be as pleased as you are, John."

He laughed a little.

"Yes. I don't deny that I'm pleased. If my little son is to be christened" (he avoided the other word, the word Mary had used), "I should like it to be there. There have been Penstephens at Ettringham for a good many years. That goes for something, does n't it, even in these days. And," he added, "I greatly want Susan to know you."

Betsy was sent for.

She was as excited as her mistress had expected.

"You'll let me come with you to choose the christening robe, won't you 'm — won't you, m'lady? It did really want but this, did n't it? And he'll be as good as gold. You'll see. Yes, my precious, you're going to Ettringham. There's for you!"

There was no difficulty about David and Georgina. Betsy had a most efficient helper now in one called Ellen. She, with Matilda the good-natured and competent housemaid, would look after them and make them quite happy in her superior's absence. Their mother had no misgivings on their account. Yet it was with a heart that was not wholly unsore that she set out for the home of their father's fathers.

Ettringham, as the home of the Penstephens, should, by the rule of the Tre-, Pol-, and Pen-, have been in Cornwall. It was, however, in the Midlands whither a branch of the Cornish family had migrated in the early part of the seventeenth century. The oldest portions of the house were Tudor; to the newest Early Victoria had contributed.

Externally the result might be a little perplexing. Internally the house was very gracious, had a pleasant atmosphere, and, thanks, rather to Victoria than to James or Anne or even the Georges, was solidly comfortable. There was a small park round it; or, more accurately speaking there was park-land, for what should have been park was divided up into fields which the late master, who did a little farming on his own account, had used for pasture. This, with some farms and the gardens in which Lady Penstephen took her pride, comprised the estate.

For Mary, Ettringham began at the station where she and John with Betsy and the sleeping child were met, and where something in the look of the waiting carriage, the sleek horses, the imposing Penstephen liveries, made a curious impression upon her.

Just what this impression was she could not have said. The things themselves seemed to stand for solidity, the established order. The very footman, touching his hat and carrying her dressing bag, was, in his long coat with the silver buttons, less a servant than a symbol of dignified service, and not of dignified service only, but, by implication, of the dignity of that which was served. À propos the thought came to her cruelly that in her own case (and more unhappily the case of her children) the symbol would have had to be a *commissionnaire!* She shook the thought from her.

The footman was putting the dressing-case into the carriage beside Betsy.

"The luggage will follow in the cart, my lady. Yes, Sir John, her ladyship is very well thank you. No, Sir John, her ladyship is alone, except of course for Miss Ingoldby."

The carriage — a landau — was very comfortable. The drive was through a flat but very pleasing country, well-wooded and well-farmed. David's father talked, pointing out this and that, and Mary, a little nervous now, answered intermittently. But she was seeing; beginning, she thought, even to understand.

"We shall pass the village of Ettringham in a minute. There 's the church through the trees — a Norman tower. I don't know whether the ceremony will be there or in the house."

"Baby 's equal to anything," said Betsy complacently. "If it was immersion even, he would n't mind."

"Oh, the sprinkling of a few drops of water," said David's father. "What is it?"

"No, sir," nodded Betsy.

"Here is the lodge. But we're not there yet. Look, Mary. Is n't it a pretty house? There used to be the sternest old woman in it when I used to stay here as a boy. She frightened me every time she opened the gates. Goodness, the austerity of those days! Goodness! Goodness!"

A buxom young woman opened the gates now. She curtseyed cheerfully.

"I'm glad you should see these rhododendrons in flower," said David's father. "I always remember what they look like. There's a quarter of a mile of them. There were rhododendrons at Cheddington too" (the home of the Calvinist uncle where his own repressed boyhood had passed) — "I used to wonder they were allowed *there* . . ." He broke off.

Mary shuddered — remembering many things.

"It must have been dreadful!" she said.

"Beauty was n't thought right, at Cheddington. Here it was a little different — though not so very. Beauty then was n't thought quite right anywhere in what were called religious circles. Ettringham was austere enough in my uncle's time — though at Cheddington I don't think even he was thought to be quite sound. You could n't quench the spirit of Ettringham, that was all. Cheddington, except

for the rhododendrons, had no spirit — no beauty anyway — to quench. You'll see the house in a moment. It's an odd jumble but there's something about it . . . "

There was. Mary's heart warmed to it when she saw.

The baby was awake now. His father leaned towards him.

"Lift him up, Betsy. I want him to see. I want my son to see Ettringham."

Betsy complied proudly. It was only a way of speaking, of course, for Johnny took notice as yet of nothing at wider range than arm's length. With exhortations and encouragement she was duly shewn, then, what he did not see.

David's mother sat back in the shadow.

A few minutes later the carriage had drawn up at the door. Its approach had been heard, and a butler and another footman were already on the steps.

Lady Penstephen rose from a low chair as they were announced. Of the two Lady Penstephens it was she who appeared the more nervous, though, even as Mary observed this, she saw that the frail little woman in the widow's cap could, none the less, be formidable. She seemed uncertain whether to kiss her or not, and when she decided to do so Mary had drawn back a little, so that there was the slightest pause before her greeting was complete. She turned to John as to some one with whom she was at ease, and then back to Mary, asking her about her journey, but somehow giving the impression that she was still addressing John.

"You'd like some tea now, and then to be shewn to your rooms. You will find my arrangements comfortable, I hope. The room I have made the nursery is quite near yours — just across the passage. You know the rooms, John. Yours and Mary's is the one you have always had. There's a sitting-room off it on one side, you may remember, where you'll like perhaps to write your letters, and the

dressing-room's the other. Your son bore the journey well? That's right! I'll come up and see him when you've had some tea. Now, let me give you some tea — Oh, I'm just waiting for the tea-pot, I see. If you kindly ring that bell, John. Ah, here it is."

No, on second thoughts Mary did not think she was nervous. She remembered a phrase or two of John's after his first visit. "She was putting a great restraint upon herself I could see that . . ." "She had been a little disappointed, I think, to hear we were married . . ." "She had looked forward, I think, to not being able to receive you . . ."

The tea, which Mary welcomed for its own sake, eased the situation a little. John was talking now. Mary, drinking her tea and answering her hostess's enquiries, became conscious, though the stiffness was there, that kindliness underlay it.

"I thought we would be alone for this evening. Tomorrow one or two people are coming to dinner — just quietly — General Burke, whom you'll like to talk to, as he's to be one of the godfathers, and my dear old Archdeacon Eversley. When you come to me next I shall hope to give some dinner-parties for you. I think I told you, John, I should have wished it even now if there had been time, for I would n't have allowed the consideration of my mourning, which would be a selfish one in this case, to interfere with what should be done in your honour. However, as I say, there has n't been time, and I promise myself this pleasure for your next visit."

Mary, who knew how carefully the guests would have had to be chosen and how discreetly approached, thought she was glad to be spared the dinner-parties. She accepted at once, however, the kindness of the intention. She could see this stiff, odd, little woman taking infinite trouble. She murmured her thanks rather than spoke them and was grateful to John who answered for her.

"It's very good of you, Susan. It would have been out of the question now. But later, later."

"It will be better later," said Lady Penstephen.

A door opened just then at the further end of the room and another lady entered. This was Miss Ingoldby, who had been governess to Lady Penstephen's dead son when he had been a small boy, and who had lived on at Ettringham since, as his mother's companion. She was a dumpy, round-about, good-tempered person in spectacles and a garden hat, and, the spectacles and the garden hat somehow helping, she relieved the tension at once. She was presented to Mary and shook hands with John.

"I long," she said, "to see Baby."

Presently a move was made. Lady Penstephen — Susan — led the way. She was a little lame and walked slowly. She was probably not much more than fifty but looked, as was indeed almost the custom then with middle-aged people, some ten or even fifteen years older than her age. Her voluminous crêpe skirts swept the polished floors.

"I don't know," she said, "whether you're fond of pictures. Some of these portraits are supposed to be good."

She paused before a picture as she spoke.

"Since I've known John here I've thought this very like him. It's an Edward Penstephen — his, let me see, his great-great-grandfather — yes, his grandfather's grandfather, that would be it. I get mixed among the greats. Do you see what I mean? — in the eyes, I think, and perhaps the mouth. If you stand here — no, a little more to the left. The light's bad. Draw that curtain a little. That's better. Now stand beside it, John."

Yes, Mary saw. But her eyes had fallen on something else. Yes, she quite saw, she said. The mouth particularly. But that one?

"Oh, that?" said Lady Penstephen without interest. "That's another Edward Penstephen."

They proceeded. In the room which had been temporarily made into a nursery they found Betsy and the baby, surrounded by a little group of women servants who

had gathered to do homage. This group vanished as if by magic as the other appeared.

Betsy rose and made obeisance.

"Now," said Lady Penstephen, "let us have a look at him."

Betsy's face was one huge beam.

Lady Penstephen looked long. She touched the round cheeks then and the little pink hands. The little pink fingers closed round one of hers. At that point she turned away.

"He does us all credit," she said to Mary.

Miss Ingoldby said more, yet less somehow than she.

John was delighted.

"Could n't be better," he said when they were alone. "She likes you, too, Mary, I can see that. She accepts us both. After all, one has to remember that from their point of view there was something to swallow."

"Yes," Mary said, "there was indeed something to swallow."

"Well, it's swallowed," said John.

Mary was n't so sure. She was still feeling a little sore. It hurt her somehow to see John himself so well satisfied. Betsy's satisfaction she could understand — though even Betsy's . . . no, not even Betsy's satisfaction was entirely comprehensible.

"Oh, David," she said to herself, "oh, David, and oh, my little Georgina."

It was as if they belonged to the years of the wandering, and the years of the wandering were to be wiped out — as if that, the wiping out, was to be the sign and the earnest of her rehabilitation. What had come to John that he should suffer it to be so? There was, one at least must think, no need for this rehabilitation if what they had done had been right. And if what they had done had been wrong all along, then — but even she, accustomed to sorrows, could not face the sorrow that lay there.

And then she saw that she was not putting the case quite

fairly. Had she not admitted, a moment before, that from Susan's point of view — the accepted point of view — there was much to get over? The thing was self-evident, and why had she come at all if she was not going to be reasonable? Why had it hurt her that her baby, whom she so tenderly loved, should be shewn Ettringham, and be shewn in turn to Ettringham? Why should Lady Penstephen's approval, wound her too?

"Betsy."

"Yes, 'm."

Betsy could never quite get out of the old ways.

"May I have him now?"

"While I unpack, m'lady. I was going to lay him in the cradle. Have you seen it, 'm? Look. Cupids, don't they call them, holding a great shell. They say it has held a French king. Well, Baby's worthy of it, that's all I've got to say."

"Give him to me," said his mother.

CHAPTER II

"It is curious," said John as they went down to dinner, "that you should have noticed that picture." They were passing it then, — the little portrait which Mary had remarked while Lady Penstephen was pointing out the big one.

There was nothing particular about it except that it bore a likeness to David — or rather that David bore a likeness to it.

"It would have been more curious if I had n't. You had seen it too! Why did n't Lady Penstephen —" She broke off. "Had you spoken of it?"

"Yes. It struck me greatly."

Then she had not been mistaken. Lady Penstephen had not responded.

"What's the matter, Mary?"

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing. What should be?"

"I thought you —"

He did not say what he had thought, not quite knowing perhaps, but he looked at her a little anxiously.

"Oh, no," she said.

A door opened in the corridor at hand and Miss Ingoldby appeared. The three went down together. Mary admired the hall — darkish now in the light of its oil lamps.

"Yes, it's a dear house," said Miss Ingoldby. "You 'll like it more when you see it in full daylight. It's been extraordinarily pulled about — you 'll see what I mean when Lady Penstephen takes you over it. It has been altered, and added to, and pulled down, and rebuilt, and restored, and goodness knows what else, and yet it is harmonious."

Lady Penstephen was down before them. She put a marker into her book as they came in, and took off her

spectacles. These she slipped into a case which hung at her side. Mary came to know the peculiar look-down which accompanied this action.

"I hope your rooms are comfortable and that your nurse has all that she wants. She seems a nice woman."

"Betsy? I don't know what we should do without her. Yes, everything she could possibly want, thank you."

Lady Penstephen turned to John.

"The Archdeacon told me he had heard from you," she said. "You wrote to General Burke too?"

"Yes, at once. It's really very good of him. Very good of them both."

"Your little son is to be congratulated on his godfathers. Two good men," she said to Mary.

Mary at that moment could not speak. It was John who said, "On his godparents. I count him luckiest of all in his godmother."

"Oh, me," said Lady Penstephen. "Ah, well. He must make the best of me."

Dinner was announced now and the party proceeded to the dining-room.

"To-morrow," Lady Penstephen said to John, "you will take the end of the table. To-night I want you beside me. One on each side of me." She motioned Mary to her right. "That's it."

Mary had been hungry. Her late tea had not taken the edge off her modest appetite. But now she was not hungry. Lady Penstephen sat on a raised chair and carved. "Let me give you a little more," was a recurring phrase at dinner in those days.

"Not any more, thank you," was Mary's answer each time that it was addressed to her.

"After your journey," Lady Penstephen remonstrated with her once.

But Mary protested that she was doing very well. She was glad when the time came for dessert. You could eat fruit when you were inclined for nothing else.

She helped herself to some grapes. The bloom on them was beautiful.

The Ettringham vines were famous, John told her.

"Ah, they're not what they used to be," Lady Penstephen said. "Since Evans died none of them seem to have borne so well. He had been head gardener here for twenty-five years. The younger men are n't what their elders were. If I did n't look after the gardens myself, they would n't be what they are, and that is n't saying very much. However, such as they are I look forward to shewing them to you to-morrow, Mary. You care for flowers?"

Mary cared for flowers.

"I forget whether you have any garden yourself. As I remember Chelsea — but years ago that is — many of the houses had gardens."

The house in Cheyne Walk had a garden. There was a pear-tree in it and one of London's rare mulberry-trees.

"A mulberry-tree," said Miss Ingoldby. "Come, that sounds like a real garden."

"It's a real mulberry tree," said Mary, smiling. "It even bears fruit. The fruit they tell us — we have n't seen it yet ourselves — does n't ripen very well — but there it is."

"I never hear of a mulberry-tree without thinking of silkworms," said Lady Penstephen. "We had silkworms as children and a neighbour of ours in Hampshire had a mulberry-tree. We used to go to him for the leaves. We called it borrowing them, I remember, or rather our nurse did, for she was our spokeswoman. 'The young ladies were wondering if you would be so kind as to lend them some — or some more (it was always some more) — mulberry leaves for the silkworms.'"

"David keeps silkworms," said David's mother, and then was angry with herself, for, of her pride, she had made up her mind not to mention him till her hostess should have spoken of him. A pause followed the remark, and, when conversation was renewed, it had gone back to the subject

of gardens and gardeners, upon both of which Lady Penstephen had much to say. The servants put the decanters on the table and withdrew.

Mary's heart was aching now. It was some moments before she could recover control of herself. No one saw — not Lady Penstephen, it is probable; certainly not Miss Ingoldby who was peeling a pear; not even David's father. Outwardly she was calm; inwardly her very soul was in arms for her first-born. For a few moments, under the black moiré and the aquamarines on their velvet bands, her bosom heaved with the stress of the storm that shook her. John seemed in league with the forces which disturbed her. When he spoke of his son he meant, not David, but the baby that lay sleeping upstairs in Betsy's arms or in the royal cradle. Did n't he see — even he? Did they want her to lose her love for her latest-born? Did they want the love which she bore him to turn to bitterness?

Susan caught her eye.

"If you won't have any more fruit? Nor you, Miss Ingoldby? No? Shall we go, then? John, we leave you to your wine."

John opened the door and they all swept out, their dresses rustling.

Yet the kindness was unmistakeable — the kindly intention. Lady Penstephen made a place for Mary on the sofa beside her, and may be said to have devoted herself to her. Mary, gentle always, repented her of her recent anger. She reminded herself again of how much her relation had had to get over to her. She was doing all she could — or, if not quite all, a great great deal. They spoke of the christening now which was to be on the next morning but one. They discussed the arrangements, Lady Penstephen informing or suggesting, Mary vaguely approving, Miss Ingoldby commenting or confirming, even occasionally contradicting.

"Miss Ingoldby is inclined to be High Church," Lady Penstephen said at one point.

"I like things done decently," said Miss Ingoldby imperturbably. "I don't see why we should n't offer the Almighty the best we have in outward things as well as in spiritual."

Mary liked the relations that existed between these two ladies. The conditions spoke well for each of them, she thought. Miss Ingoldby by no means always agreed with Lady Penstephen.

"There would n't be surplices," she said to Mary now in parenthesis, "if it was n't for me."

Mary smiled but said nothing. It was so long since she had heard that sort of talk. Vestments; the Eastward Position. She used to hear these words, surely, long long ago!

"You are calling him John," Lady Penstephen said presently.

"His name is John," Mary said. She meant that he had been registered as John.

The two ladies beside her exchanged glances.

"She said that exactly like Zacharias," was what they said to each other afterwards.

Lady Penstephen was making a scrap-work screen. The frame itself, fourfold and covered with canvas, had been made by the village carpenter. Her friends collected pictures for her — odds and ends, the coloured plates from magazines or the special numbers of the illustrated weekly papers; old Christmas cards, valentines; shiny pictures from the covers of bon-bon boxes or glove boxes; pictures from advertisements; decorative oddments, arabesques, initial letters, tail-pieces. Nothing came amiss to the heterogeneous collection. She had now much more material than she could use, but from time to time more arrived.

One panel was finished. It was, of course, a panel spoiled, the plain canvas looking much better than that which was covered. Nobody, however, thought so, for in those days scrap-work was the fashion.

"When the whole is done you have it varnished," Miss

Ingoldby explained. "I believe I could do the varnishing myself, but Lady Penstephen does n't trust me."

"It would be such a pity if anything went wrong. I don't so much distrust your ability, Posy, as your varnish. Think, if it was sticky and would n't dry, or if it turned yellow as varnishes so often do. No, I shall send it up to London."

The situation grew momentarily easier. Even Miss Ingoldby's Christian name helped, as before her garden-hat and her spectacles had helped. Mary wondered what it was short for. She was never to know, for she never heard and she never asked. All the same, Posy — Posy Ingoldby! Yes, it helped. She forgot her soreness.

"Perhaps Lady Penstephen would like to do some," Miss Ingoldby suggested tentatively.

Do some what, Mary wondered vaguely. Susan seemed to know for she said, "Oh, not to-night. She is tired after her journey. It would try her eyes. You would n't, would you? or would you?"

Mary protested that she was n't tired.

"We generally cut out in the evening, Miss Ingoldby and I, when we are alone —"

"The pictures, you know," said Miss Ingoldby — "the scraps. They have to be cut out. There are margins and things."

"Oh, I should like it," said David's mother.

"Then will you kindly ring," said Lady Penstephen to Miss Ingoldby.

Miss Ingoldby rang — twice, Mary noticed. The double ring was probably an indication of what was required, for, when the footman appeared, he carried two trays which he placed upon chairs near his mistress. The trays contained the materials.

"These," Lady Penstephen said, "are what we have still to do, and these are what we have done."

Scissors were brought then to the two ladies of the house, and a pair found for the visitor. When John joined the

three ladies, a few minutes later, he found them all busily snipping.

Again he was pleased. Mary met his eye and smiled to him. She was sorry for the anger which he had not perceived. She wanted him to know that all had gone smoothly in his absence. John wanted to cut out also. Amid jestings and banterings he too was provided with scissors, and the four, the three women and the man, were presently all engaged in the work. A family picture at once.

They all worked in different ways: John, resolutely, yet a little impetuously — running his scissors where it was possible up a line without moving them at the joint; Susan Penstephen, very slowly but very accurately, never making a false cut or needing to go over a bit a second time; Miss Ingoldby, in a business-like mode and with a good deal of scissor play, like a barber, who, between his snippings, snips in the air as if to keep his hand in, or even to preserve unbroken the chain of sound; Mary, quietly and painstakingly, neither quickly nor slowly, thinking her own thoughts, but intent, nevertheless, on the work of her fingers.

Every now and then somebody spoke.

When John's scissors moved very quickly — he chose for the most part big pictures with straight edges — his cousin looked up a little anxiously. She said nothing to him, but asked Miss Ingoldby if, snipping as she did, she was not afraid she would snip something which she did not intend to snip.

"I believe," she said, "in hastening slowly."

"John," said Mary, "go carefully."

"Oh, he is all right," said Lady Penstephen.

"It's the scissors," said Miss Ingoldby. "They sound as if they were running away with me, but they're not."

Mary suddenly thought of Katinka and of the room at Homburg which she had made so delightful by her gentle enchantments. This was her sort of work. How she would have loved it. How she would have delighted in directing

the young scissors of David and Georgina. 'Ach, not so kvick — not pressing so much — Softly round de line like dis.' Mary could see her, hear her. Some day, she thought, she would like to have Katinka near her again. But this she knew would never be. Katinka had played her part (as — though Mary did not think of this — the ladies of Brussels and again of Homburg had played theirs), and belonged to, though actually it was she who had brought to an end, the days of the wandering. Mary cut for a moment blindly, and nearly did what John, for all his haste, had not done.

"Oh," she said, "I all but cut it in half." She was cutting out a horse. "I stopped myself in time. But how careless of me."

"My dear, it would n't have mattered."

Miss Ingoldby asked if there was n't somebody's horse which *was* cut in half — some horse of history or fable. She searched in the recesses of her mind.

No one remembered.

It was then Miss Ingoldby who was like to make false cuts. She puckered her brow as she racked and raked her brain.

Snip, snip, snip went the four pairs of scissors. Snip, snip, snip — rhythmic sometimes as the stitch, stitch, stitch, of the *Song of the Shirt*.

"How the scissors hurt the base of your thumb when it is cardboard you are cutting." Lady Penstephen was struggling with the top of a chocolate box.

"Let me," said John.

"No, I've nearly done it. I steam these off. I want just to make it small enough to go over the slop-basin when tea comes in. It saves so much trouble."

The servants appeared with tea almost as she spoke. The rather elaborate equipage which included a tea-caddy and a hissing urn into which at the last moment a red hot heater had been dropped, was placed on a table near the hearth. Miss Ingoldby put down her scissors and rose at

once. She shook out her skirts into the fender and went to the table.

David's mother watched the process of the tea-making much as David himself might have watched it. Miss Ingoldby poured boiling water into the tea-pot, rinsed it, and warmed all the cups. She then unlocked the tea-caddy — a matter of form, for the key had arrived in the lock and was left there — and with a little shell-shaped spoon which she heaped generously she put the delicious smelling leaves into the tea-pot. She turned on the tap of the urn and the pleasant gurgling sound which Betsy had once described was heard in the tea-pot. After that she returned to her work for a few minutes, which, Mary saw, she measured by the clock on the mantelpiece. At an exact moment she put down her scissors again and went back to the tea-table.

"Tea," she said. An announcement not an interrogation.

Lady Penstephen watched for the moment when she might have the use of the slop-basin for steaming her scraps, as a dog watches for a promised biscuit. She was happy when with its aid she was enabled to peel off the waiting pictures from the stubborn cardboard.

So the evening passed. Towards ten o'clock John began to fidget a little. Mary, who knew him, felt herself to be waiting.

The servants came back and cleared away the tea-things. Lady Penstephen kept back the slop-basin with which she had not quite finished.

"Give us," Lady Penstephen said to the butler, "till a quarter past."

"Very good, my lady."

He bowed and withdrew. John put down his scissors and took them up again.

Lady Penstephen turned to Mary.

"We have Prayers," she said.

Mary said "Yes?" vaguely, and felt herself to be waiting.

"John may have told you."

He had not.

Lady Penstephen tried the edge of a steaming picture. It came away a little from the cardboard but was not quite ready. She tried another. Mary watched it as it peeled off, curling up as it came away free.

"They come off so easily," Lady Penstephen said, "when they are quite ready. If one tries to force them they only tear. How hot this water is. The steam quite burns me. I don't know, Mary, whether you would care to join us."

She did not look up. Mary watched her fingers as she made little dabs at the hot wet paper. Miss Ingoldby's scissors went snip, snip, snip. John cut vigorously.

Everyone now seemed to be waiting, though the work went on. Mary noticed many things in the room, things which she had seen all along but had not observed. The carpet had roses in its pattern. There were some big Italian chairs with carved gold backs and arms. The great glass chandelier, in which the candles were not lighted, must be of immense weight. There was a great deal of china in and on the cabinets, and two groups of figures on each side of the clock on the mantelpiece were specially beautiful.

"You must do exactly as you like," Lady Penstephen was saying.

What Mary wanted greatly to know, but would not ask, was whether John when he was at Ettringham attended Prayers. A hush seemed to her to have come over the room. Lady Penstephen bent over her work, but not more than before. Her widow's cap was very white against the quite different white of her face.

"Yes," Mary said at last, "I think I should like to."

John did not move, but some sort of tension seemed to be relaxed.

"Münchausen!" said Miss Ingoldby with a jerk.

Lady Penstephen looked towards her.

"Münchausen," she said again, "don't you remember? The horse. I knew I should think of it presently. Cut in two, you know, by the portcullis."

"To be sure," said John, "Baron Münchausen."

Lady Penstephen slowly pushed the bowl from her.

"Do you know," she said solemnly, "this is the first time that I realised that he was n't an Englishman."

She looked round at them all with a pucker of laughter somewhere behind her spectacles. She took them off now and Mary saw the down-look (one eyelid 'catching' a little) as she sheathed them in the case at her waist.

"How?" said Miss Ingoldby.

"You'll hardly believe it of me," she said gravely, "but I suppose I have been giving him his seat in our own House of Lords, for not till this moment have I known that he was n't called Baron Mun-Chawson."

She began then to laugh at herself. She laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

"Baron Mun-Chawson!" she repeated.

Mary was quite sure, now, that she liked her. She even understood in a measure John's wish to please her. They were all still laughing at nothing when the butler appeared.

"A quarter-past ten, my lady."

"Very well, Barton."

He withdrew. Lady Penstephen, recovering her gravity at once, rose and she and Miss Ingoldby shook out their skirts into the fender. Mary followed suit. Then, Lady Penstephen leading, the four made their way through two dimly lighted rooms to what Mary saw must be the library.

A lamp stood on a table at the far end of it. Lady Penstephen seated herself at this table, took out the spectacles she had just put away, adjusted them, and opened the books. She found her places. Armchairs were on each side of her and in these the others seated themselves, John and Mary on one side, Miss Ingoldby on the other. There was a pause. Then a side door, at the end of the room at which they had entered, opened, and there came in a long procession of servants, who ranged themselves in order on chairs which had been placed to receive them. There was a rustling, a creaking, and then silence.

What was John thinking? That was what David's mother was wondering. It was evident to her now, that he had attended Prayers when he had stayed at Ettringham without her. It was odd that he had not told her. Yet it was not odd. What was he thinking, though? What did he think? Again she felt wounded, — hurt somewhere deep down in her soul. So deeply, however, that she did not know the nature of the wound, nor could she even gauge the extent of her suffering. So might one suffer under an incomplete anæsthetic; so did one suffer sometimes when one yet spoke of one's pain as numbed. It was not that she did not wish to be there, or wish him to be there. Had she not ached often and often for the consolation which she knew others found in religious exercises, — yes, and in religion? Had she not wished in her heart that her children might not be denied what had been denied to her — what she, perhaps, had denied to herself?

The incident of their forbidden young prayers — Betsy and her pious leanings, yearnings, nay, in this instance, strivings — had been a very real thing to her. With Betsy she had wished them to learn to pray. Who had forbidden that? Yet why should it make her sore to see David's father acquiescing, howsoever passively, in what stood for that which she secretly had desired and he had opposed? Ought she not rather to be glad?

What was he thinking?

There were eleven servants. She had counted them half-consciously as they filed to their places. Their faces, when she glanced in their direction, were whiter dimnesses in the dimness of the end of the big room. The cook, who sat next to Lady Penstephen's maid Denham, looked a very small person to be at the head of the large household. She was the smallest person in the room, Mary thought — half the size of both the young women whom, from their lowly position in the row, she judged to be the kitchen maids.

Lady Penstephen, quite unconsciously it was probable, assumed a strange voice when she read, sounding the 'ed's'

of past participles and even changing the pronunciation of a word or two, as for instance when she said 'er-red' in the General Confession, the 'er' as in 'errand' — though, elsewhere, Mary felt sure, she would have said the word as if it had been spelt 'er'd.' She read, that is to say, as was the fashion then, in what has since been described as a holy way, and, when the prayer was supplicatory, addressed the Almighty in a tone of anguish. If she had been a dissenter she would have prayed with groanings. She contrived, as it was, to make some of the prayers from the Book of Common Prayer sound as if they had been *ex tempore* — yet always somehow without spoiling their beauty. To "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord," Mary, facing the sombre leather of the chair against which she knelt — the dimness contributing, the night-feeling, night thoughts — felt her heart warm. She would like David, she thought, to commit himself to sleep with some such words as these. "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen."

And then the Lord's Prayer.

She had been ten years old when her parents had broken away from convention and the course of her training had been changed. Something had always remained to her of what had gone before. Did the root of her unhappiness lie in that? She listened to the words as in a dream.

"Which art in heaven . . . "

Something even about the 'Which.' (David presently, as we may see, was to feel much in the same way.) The words came to her, — not that they had not all along been familiar to her, yet as across a great distance. She knew them intimately, as one knows the *clichés* of everyday talk, but she heard them freshly.

"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen."

The model prayer for all time. If the whole thing could have been left there. . . . And then as she heard the next words she felt that she did not quite want it left there.

"The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord . . ."

That could not be spared. Nor this surely —

"The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace, both now and evermore. Amen."

She heard herself say 'Amen' to that.

She was still in her dream when a pushing-back of chairs and a scraping of feet on the polished boards told her that Prayers were over.

The servants trooped out.

Mary did not look at David's father but she was very conscious of him — conscious too, somehow, that he would not, if possible, speak of this part of the evening's doings, or, if he did, that he would do so superficially.

They went back to the drawing-room which felt very light and warm after the dim library. Lady Penstephen finished unpeeling the last of her cardboard pictures, and put it with the others that she had done, into one of the china ornaments, there to dry undisturbed. Miss Ingoldby gave a final snip or two to the figure upon which she had been engaged when she had been interrupted, and a final series of snips in the air, and then, gathering the done and the undone into their respective trays, she put these one on top of the other for the servants to put away. Despite the careful shakings-out, a litter of little bits of paper lay on the carpet. In the hall was a tray of silver candlesticks.

There was a fire, Lady Penstephen told John, in the smoking-room.

He lighted the three ladies' candles and wished his cousin and Miss Ingoldby good-night.

So passed the evening. Lady Penstephen came with Mary to her room to see for herself that all was comfortable. She touched things here and there, straightened an ornament on the mantelpiece, poked the fire, rearranged the cushions on the couch at the foot of the bed.

She asked again if Mary was sure that she had everything that she wanted, and Mary, one thing being so grievously lacking, assured her that she had.

"Then I'll say good-night to you," Lady Penstephen said. She looked about for her candle. Ah, to be sure, on the table. She had extinguished it as she came in — thereby, perhaps, causing Mary to think she was going to stop for that talk which, as holding potential balm for her wounded spirit, she, Mary, would have welcomed so heartily.

"Everything, thank you," Mary said again, disappointed.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

The two ladies exchanged kisses.

CHAPTER III

It was long before David's mother slept that night. John came up about an hour later, and, for the first time in her life, Mary, that she might not have to talk, that she might not be tempted to talk, and also in a measure to spare him embarrassment, pretended to be asleep. She was touched when he bent over her and kissed her ever so lightly.

When by the sound of his regular breathing she knew that he slept, she lay with wide-open eyes and watched the firelight play on the ceiling. All sounds ceased in the house. The stillness grew intense. The hours passed; she heard them strike, up to three, from some outdoor clock in one of the buildings. She found it next day — a black-faced clock with weather-worn hands, over the stables. After three o'clock she must have slept.

There were Morning Prayers, but these were held before breakfast and were over when she and John came down the next day. Lady Penstephen and Miss Ingoldby were in the dining-room. The urn had just been brought in, and with it the post-bag which Lady Penstephen unlocked when she had greeted her guests, and from which she proceeded then to dispense the letters.

"You slept well, I hope?"

John answered for them both.

"And Baby?"

Baby had had an excellent night.

Though they had left home but the day before there was already a letter from Ellen, who interpreted her instructions to write every day quite literally, to say that all was well in Cheyne Walk.

It was a lovely morning of early summer. The chilliness

which had made fires so welcome the day before was quite gone, though it would come back, Lady Penstephen prophesied, by the evening, and sunlight streamed in through the windows. Mary, heartened by it and by her letter, felt her spirits rising. The room was delightful. English food after the years of the foreign hotels and apartments was still delicious to her. She was interested as a child in what was about her. There was a silver egg-boiler presided over by Miss Ingoldby, which pleased her greatly, and it was as much for the sake of seeing it in operation as for the sake of the egg laid that morning that she smiled her thanks to Miss Ingoldby's nodded invitation.

"Two," said Miss Ingoldby persuasively, "we're so proud of our eggs."

"Oh, one," said Mary, with bacon already on her plate.

"But John will have two," said Lady Penstephen.

A friendly atmosphere. Everything very simple, but everything very perfect of its kind. The heavy tea-pot was Georgian; the cups Worcester, and as rare as many of those which were treasured in the cabinets. Mary thought to herself that she liked using beautiful things. The tea-caddy, with the key in it, was beside Lady Penstephen who had evidently made the tea in the room. The urn was still hissing and steaming. It, too, was very beautiful. All these things, with even the pleasant smell of coffee and of hot rolls, had their part in lifting the weight from Mary's heart.

"I thought we would drive this afternoon," Lady Penstephen was saying. "This morning you would like perhaps to see the house and the gardens."

Mary said she would like that — like both those proposals, and spoke of the view from the windows of her room. She had hardly known that a country without hills could be so lovely.

Lady Penstephen was Warwickshire-born and said "Is n't it? Is n't it?" and looked at Miss Ingoldby. "Miss Ingoldby," she said, "is a Sussex woman and won't admit our good looks."

"Oh, I'll admit them with pleasure," said Miss Ingoldby, "but give me hills, give me downs. Give me something to climb."

Lady Penstephen smiled at her affectionately. Mary could see that she was very fond of her companion.

"Your native heath before mine, Posy."

"That's it," said Miss Ingoldby, smiling back at her. "But Ettringham I concede to you." She turned to the other Lady Penstephen. "There's something about Ettringham. You'll see what I mean — you'll feel it."

"I think I do already," said Mary.

John looked pleased. So did Lady Penstephen, the widow.

"Yes," she said. "Everyone feels it. There's something about Ettringham."

When breakfast was over the two ladies of the house, excusing themselves on the plea of household matters which would claim them for half an hour, disappeared, and John and Mary were left alone.

"Come out into the garden," said John, and led the way by a side door on to the terrace outside.

The beautiful flat country lay before them, and delighted Mary again, — pasture — pasture everywhere, and trees. There was a humming of bees, a slow cawing of rooks, the cooing of amorous pigeons. All the influences of the morning were pleasant.

"How could you ever have said she was ridiculous?" she asked, speaking with her thoughts for context.

Her eyes travelled over the landscape from point to point. The whole world seemed to be green.

"You like her too," John said. "I knew you would like her."

And then at the corner of the house, at a point where Victoria across the centuries shook hands most improbably with the second Charles, they came upon Betsy bearing her precious charge for his airing.

She raised his veil, and his mother bent over him. His

eyes were open and he jerked in Betsy's arms and smiled, and his mother's heart swelled with love for him. He had caused her the greatest sorrow she had known yet, but as he smiled she forgot everything except that he was flesh of her flesh.

"Give him to me, Betsy."

She held him to her, laughing into his funny little eyes, but inwardly yearning over him. He ought to have been a girl. On every count he ought to have been a girl. But — oh, David, forgive her! — there was that, after all, in having brought a man-child into the world which made her know that, come what might, she would not have changed him now if a miracle had given her the power to do so.

She gave him back hurriedly to Betsy.

Presently the two ladies joined them. Lady Penstephen now wore over her dress a brown holland apron with capacious pockets bound and outlined with red braid, and on her head a garden-hat of the shape known as 'Dolly Varden.' Miss Ingoldby, in her garden-hat also, carried, with her flat wooden basket, a pair of shears. The idea of benevolent snipping was, it seemed, always to be associated with Miss Ingoldby.

These were the days when care of the complexion — the protection of it, that is, from the influences of sun and wind — was looked upon in the light of almost a religious obligation, and Lady Penstephen, at the sight of the hatless Mary, held up her hands in horror.

"My dear, the sun!" she said. "Your complexion. You'll ruin it — ruin it. Let John, I beg of you, fetch your hat."

Mary was for shaking her head. She was endowed with a healthy skin and took no thought for it. But as she saw that Lady Penstephen was really exercised about her lack of caution, she suffered the hat to be fetched — John, with a twinkle for her, volunteering to go for it — and, like an obedient child, she put it on when it arrived.

Thus equipped she was led through the gardens. The morning passed delightfully.

But afterwards Mary found that, as before, something all through had been overlooked, or withheld, or barred-out. In spite of herself she began now again to watch and to wait for mention of her two other children. During the drive that afternoon Lady Penstephen did not name either of them. She spoke of Baby, with the most capital of B's, continually, but David and Georgina, for any sign that she gave, might not have existed at all.

Mary, not knowing what to make of so strange a reticence, felt with some alarm her soreness returning. For John's sake she wanted this visit to pass off successfully. A tremendous concession had been made, she knew, in having her there at all. She was being received intimately — warmly, affectionately, even. The trifling incident of the hat that morning shewed the personal note in Susan's relations with her. Everything shewed it; a word, a look, the unceremonious evening with the scraps and the scissors. She was 'accepted.' But her children? David? Georgina? What did it mean?

She went up to her room with lagging steps. The beauty of the staircase and of the gracious landings and passages said nothing to her. She experienced a sudden and acute nostalgia for the house which held her children; for Homburg; for odd little French and Italian towns; for railway-stations, trains, hotel omnibusses; for pass-ports, tickets, the ætna, the holland-covered box; for the sounds of travel, shuntings, shoutings, hootings, whistles — for the days of the wandering, the old distrusted days which had yet held her children so closely. Those seemed the safe days now — the unthreatened days even. Her heart was very heavy.

And, at the mercy now of her thoughts, a sort of nervousness seized her as the hour approached for dinner.

The idea of meeting strangers oppressed her — strangers too, who, strangers as they were to her, had been asked to stand in intimate relation to her son. She suffered Betsy to dress her, when the time came for dressing, in the dress which Betsy had decided she must wear. She submitted to Betsy's choice of the jewellery which was to adorn her for what Betsy insisted on calling the dinner-party. But when all was done and she had taken her fan and her gloves from her, she could hardly have told you what she was wearing.

Betsy, though all was indeed done, the finishing touches given, pats, smoothings, straightenings, lingered. She was like a chef whose efforts have not been appreciated. It was she, though she did not know it, who was to help her mistress to get through the evening.

"Yes, Betsy?"

"Nothing, m'lady. That is if you've nothing to say? I thought myself —"

David's mother turned troubled eyes on her.

"Not so much as a look in the glass. Not a word. It is a little disheartening."

"Betsy!"

"Well, is n't it, m'lady? And you looking like a picture. It's as if you did n't care. As if your beautiful looks was wasted on you. The time come when you take your rightful place in the world, and us all so proud of you, and no more interest in what you put on than if this," she touched her mistress's dress which afforded her so much satisfaction and which she had helped to choose and design, "was a reach-me-down."

Well, she would go through with it. John found her smiling when he came in from his dressing-room. He, at least, said what pleased Betsy, for he declared that her mistress had never looked better.

"There, m'lady, you see," said Betsy, appeased, yet still only partly appeased.

"I've hurt Betsy's feelings," said Mary, "but indeed, Betsy, I did n't mean it. I think you do wonders with me."

"There you go," said Betsy. "Ah no, sir, it's enough to make one. As if —" with privileged exasperation — "the wonder was n't in your ladyship's self."

But Mary was smiling, and the spirit of the smile, shewing the diverted thoughts, took her to the drawing-room. What matter, after all? What matter? David, if she knew him, would justify himself.

The evening, as Lady Penstephen had prophesied, was chilly, and the four persons whom the room held stood by the fire. Archdeacon and Mrs. Eversley had just been announced. Mary saw a little old man with white hair and shrewd if benevolent eyes, and a lady whom she took at first to be of the rather masterful kind. But even her sensitiveness could find no fault with their reception of the introduction when it was made. Lady Penstephen in making it said, "My dear cousin, Lady Penstephen." Both responded cordially. Nor, Mary saw, did the lady look at her unduly. John they both knew. If there was a shade of reserve in their manner this was kept for him. Mary would have said that time had been when they had disapproved of him very gravely. But the reserve, if at all it existed, was generally imperceptible. Mary may even have imagined it, and before the evening was over she believed that she had.

There was a little desultory talk about nothing in particular, and then the remaining guest was announced, and the party was complete.

Mary looking round the dinner table saw that she need not have felt nervous. The two old men, representing the Church, and, less directly perhaps, the World, who had undertaken to be sponsors for her little son, inspired confidence, and there was nothing in the manner of either of them to suggest that the circumstances were felt to be

other than usual. This, of course, is to say no more than that Lady Penstephen's two friends were gentlemen, but Mary, who had suffered so grievously, had not suffered for nothing.

"I've known John from a boy," General Burke said. "It delights me to be godfather to his son."

The Archdeacon, talking to her later, said much the same thing, and if he, upon his part, conveyed that what really made him happier was that John should come at last to see need for godfathers, he did this so tactfully that there was nothing in his words that savoured of preaching.

And as the evening passed pleasantly Mary saw that, though none of the three attempted to understand, each was ready unreservedly to accept her. The past was done with: this was the unspoken attitude towards it and her — a generous, and, for the dark and narrow seventies, an exceptional attitude as she knew. If, she felt, she could but know that David and Georgina were accepted with her she would be happy. Well, she was to be happy for this evening. The three strangers severally asked her for and about her other children, and her relation, though she made no comment or enquiries upon her own account, patted her hand, when in answering some question of Mrs. Eversley's about David, Mary shewed perhaps something of her heart. Then Mary, if she could not quite forgive her, felt at least partly appeased — though, like Betsy, whose grievance she now suddenly comprehended, not more, even then, when all was weighed and considered, than partly appeased! Still, on the whole and in howsoever qualified a measure, happy.

"Those nice people," she said when they were gone. "That nice Mrs. Eversley. I was n't sure at first whether she was n't going to be a little alarming. But she is n't alarming at all. And the Archdeacon who looks like a Bellini saint — yes, and your nice General Burke."

"My dear, they were charmed with you. They all managed to say so before they went."

Yes, on the whole a very happy evening. The next day the baby was christened — 'John,' as he had already long since been named — and, on the day following, the visitors, to the tune of repeated expressions of good-will upon both sides, thankings, renewed invitations, and the like, returned to London.

"I am so glad to know you, my dear Mary," were Susan's last words, "and to know our little John here. We must see a great deal of him by and by at Ettringham. I expect great things of him. His godmother is, and is going to be, very proud of him."

John shewed his pleasure and Mary hers. But, deep down in her heart, and not to be shaken by the fact that before a month was out her other two children (at their father's wish) had been christened also, Mary had the knowledge that she and they — and somehow especially she and David — had once and for all been betrayed.

CHAPTER IV

Was it Katinka and the Homburg actings? Was it the element of drama that the peculiar conditions of his wandering life had made an essential factor of it? Was it his first pantomime which he had seen that year — at Astley's (Betsy's treat this!) in the Westminster Bridge Road — and which he was never to forget? Or was it something deeper? Part of him? Something that ran in his blood? David knew if no one else did. All the mysteries were here.

He was eleven when he began to know; at school in earnest in his first term, and something had happened. Something had happened at the very outset. The inevitable "What's your father?" of the first few bewildering minutes had led to an incomprehensible situation which, if it was not to endure for very long, was yet to taint all memories of his school-days with vague discomfort. They — his school-days — were not to be unhappy. After the first few weeks they were indeed to be quite tolerable, but always, behind what negative or even positive happiness they gave him, there was to be the recollection of the thing which had given him so false a start. Something had been said. That it should be possible that something could be said! The sting lay there.

"What's your father?"

The big bullying boy of every school, of every story of any school, the conventional, nay, the traditional bully asked it, and had to ask twice, for David had not understood.

"How do you mean, what is he?"

"How do I mean, what is he?" David's shy treble was mimicked, to a roar from a gallery of little asses, not one of whom, maybe, was actually ill-disposed towards him.

"What is he, you young fool? Is he in the Army?"

"No."

"Or the Navy?"

"No."

"Well, is he in the Civil Service or at the Bar?"

David did not think so. The idea had never occurred to him. Had your father to be something? It seemed so. His dame-school had been too young and too ladylike a place for such blunt questionings.

"He's a gentleman at large, I suppose." Our assertive friend was being funny, and the gallery laughed again.

David supposed so. He had not the vaguest notion of what At Large meant. He knew what Gentleman meant. His father was one. He was one himself. He did not believe that the good-looking boy who was baiting him was or could be. He conceived an immortal hatred of him — a hatred that hurt because the bullying boy was good-looking, and it was always dreadful to him not to worship any one who pleased his eye.

"Well, what's he called, anyway?"

"How do you mean, called?"

David, it must be admitted, was not doing himself justice.

"How do I mean, called?" An opportunity again, it will be seen, for the mimic. The gallery shouted.

David was told he was green.

"Is he Mister, you young fool. Or is he a parson, or perhaps he's a doctor?"

"He was Mister."

"Oh, he was Mister, was he? And what is he now?"

"Sir John," said David at last, getting very red.

"Oh, he's Sir John, is he? Well, why did n't you say so at first?"

David did n't know.

"Is he a baronet or only a knight," somebody asked; and the good-looking boy said, "I bet he's only a knight."

"You're quite wrong," David said to that. He did, it happened, know the difference between the one and the

other. You could n't inherit a knighthood, and his father had inherited.

"Are you the eldest?" was the next question, and David said that he was.

"Then, when your father dies you'll be Sir Thingamy Penstephen."

David supposed so, but so low that he was n't heard.

"What does he say?"

"He says when his father dies he'll be Sir Thingamy P."

That was all, for the moment. The common attention fastened on to something or to somebody else, and David, only smarting a little, was released from the inquisition. But the thing was n't over. What he was said to have said was repeated. The good-looking boy was a day-boy, and may have talked at home. His parents may have pricked up their ears and talked too. Nothing dreadful happened, but it became known in the school that there was something about young Penstephen — something about his father; something vaguely discreditable. He must be one of *those* Penstephens was what the good-looking boy's father may have said, looking, let us suppose, at the good-looking boy's mother — (some particular Penstephens, it would seem, differing from all other Penstephens) — and if so, poor boy . . . well . . . H'm . . . Ha . . . But Sir Thingamy P., eh? Sir Thingamy P., eh? That was just what . . . However, the poor boy himself had done nothing and we must n't be uncharitable. One could n't, of course, help wondering whether he would be quite a desirable companion for other boys. Still . . .

Thus and thus. But quite enough to make talk in a school. Quite enough to mark David out from the rest. He found himself saddled with a nickname, and would not have minded that, if something which he did not understand and which even some of those who employed it did not understand either, had not quite obviously lain behind it. It was as if the name was given negatively — given to him because it was not (as of course it was not) his.

Well, the incident passed — more or less. He was wounded and bore a scar, but other things cropped up to occupy his exercised thoughts. Difficulties in so many directions confronted him, — difficulties which, owing to the peculiarities of his up-bringing, were incalculable. How could he do himself justice? Everywhere he found himself astray or up against what was unfamiliar to him. Chapel! Misery. He did not know how to behave in Chapel.

His father, sending him to school, had withdrawn all restrictions. How handicapped he was we may guess. There was a ritual and he did not know it. He set his teeth and aped what the others did, only to discover that there were things that no mere copying would cover. He could not find his places. There were some awful moments during which he was conscious of nothing but a boy next to him who was, and who had been, watching him. Then, "Can't you *read?*" whispered the boy, and he whispered back angrily that of course he could read. But he could not pretend to be able to find the Psalms, nor presently the Te Deum, nor, when the time came for the Litany, the Litany. Shame dyed his cheeks. He hated the boy who watched him. He had presently to hate many more. He would have enjoyed Chapel (it had even to do with his discovery) if he had not felt that any false move would betray him — that his hesitations were betraying him, had betrayed him. He forestalled the questions that would be put to him. Why could n't he find the Psalms? Why was he left standing up that time — well, nearly left — when all the rest were sitting? Why had he scrambled to his feet when he ought to have been kneeling? Shame unspeakable!

And all the time he was doing so well. Inevitable that he should make some mistakes; little short of wonderful that he should make so few!

What the boy said afterwards was, "I believe you're a dissenter."

"A what?" said David.

"A dissenter — Chapel, you know."

David was further astray, but (or and) closed on the word Chapel. This was Chapel, was n't it?

"It's called Chapel here because they always are in schools, but it's Church, of course, really. Church of England. I believe you're a Methodist or a Wesleyan or a Plymouth Brother or something. Yes, you are. If you are n't you'd know how to find the Psalms. Then, why could n't you? It was n't as if it was one of those days when you have Proper Psalms — you know, Proper Psalms Appointed for this Morning — when you have to find them by the Roman numbers, X's and L's and C's. It was just an ordinary day of the month."

David had nothing to say — or a great deal too much! — so very wisely held his peace. But he felt deeply humiliated. He contrived the next day to smuggle a prayer-book out of Chapel with him and set himself resolutely to learn to find his way about its pages. This, so little privacy has a boy at school, he had to do at odd times and in the strangest places. Difficulties, perplexities, humiliations.

Then, suddenly a change. Chapel, from being terrible, became a delight to him. He was too aloof from conventional religious exercises for the real spirit of them to take hold of him, or even to mean much to him, but the beauty of the Services themselves made a powerful impression on him. The sound of the rolling sentences was a joy to him. Afterwards he knew that what he was to mean later by the Theatre — the Theatre in the French sense — was here also.

Rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him: neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws which he set before us.

I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

This one particularly. Consider. These things came to him newly. No 'Line upon Line' had prepared him for them; no 'Peep o' Day' opened his eyes to the wide range of what lay behind them. All was sheer new wonder to him. A fresh opening, of course, for the enemy. He was interested where the rest were bored, and . . . well, we all know boys!

"Nineteenth morning of the month, Sir Thingamy P. O come let us sing."

"When you are Sir Thingamy you'll have a private chapel of your own, won't you, and you'll be able to have service all day long if you like and say, Oh, ain't the collix lovely! Which do you like best, Thingamy, the Psalms or the sermon?"

Well, what matter? Let the tongues wag.

David did not care for sermons. He did like the Psalms. He had lighted on the seventy-eighth in his explorations and it had thrilled him.

So he commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven.

David could see 'Him' doing that.

He caused the east wind to blow under heaven, and through his power he brought in the south-west-wind . . .

He smote their cattle with hail-stones, and their flocks with hot thunderbolts . . .

Hot thunderbolts!

He cast upon them the furiousness of his wrath, anger, displeasure and trouble, and sent evil spirits among them . . .

Furiousness! Evil spirits!

He made a way to his indignation and spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence . . .

A way to his indignation. The word Death. The word Pestilence.

And the wonderful hundred-and-seventh, with the un-

even beat of its refrain! Young as he was, he perceived the unevenness of the beat, and he counted the verses to see exactly how uneven it was. The refrain came after the seventh verse, he found; then after the fourteenth; then after the twentieth; then not till after the thirtieth; and then, when your ear and your eye had got accustomed to its uncertain recurrence and watched for it as astronomers for the (surer) return of a comet, it came no more at all. This in itself was fascinating, but how fascinating (not David's word, but what David meant!) *it* was. How — David's word had to be 'jolly' — then, how very jolly!

O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.

Nor was this all. The Psalm was full of pictures.

Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron.

To hear such words for the first time. Think of it.

They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters.

(Can we be sure that David was not greatly privileged?)

These men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.

Wonders in the deep!

Pictures of the sea then:

For at his word the stormy wind ariseth which lifteth up the waves thereof.

They are carried up to the heaven, and down again to the deep: their soul melteth away because of the trouble.

They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits end.

So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble he delivereth them out of their distress.

Then the lovely *For he maketh the storm to cease so that the waves thereof are still;* and the thrice lovely (even David knew this!) *Then are they glad because they are at rest, and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.*

O that men — Yes, the refrain came there right enough. There the refrain had to come — could not help itself.

Worth being laughed at to be so happy? David made half his discovery then. There were compensations? Certainly there were compensations. What matter if there was something about you? If you were n't to the accepted pattern? If you did not know your way; had to go cautiously where others were sure-footed, to learn by painful experience what to the rest was second nature — what matter any of these things when there were such compensations? Nor were compensations all. There were sanctuaries. You could get away. You could get where they could not follow you — where they, the boys to scale and to pattern, had not the wit to follow you. You were free of them the day you knew that. It was then as it was with Alice in Wonderland when she said, "You're only a pack of cards." You had only to know.

So, more slowly than most boys, but also quite surely, David settled down. He was never to be entirely popular, for the reasons stated, and also such other reasons as that he spoke French too well for an Englishman, 'knew' German, and even had a smattering of Italian. But he had all the friends he wanted. The masters liked him, and the French master, since David was the only boy who could answer him in his own tongue without effort, and since, moreover, he was perhaps the only boy in the school who saw nothing to laugh at in the fact of your being a foreigner, shewed a marked preference for him. These things, in the odd boy-world, went also against him. But for the most part he had managed to get himself accepted, and, because there was a quiet force in the little withdrawn boy which by degrees made itself felt, accepted upon his own terms. He would have his own terms or none. He found presently, too, that he could make a friend of an enemy if he chose, and could, before the term was over, have captured the good-looking bullying boy. But here he did not choose.

And then, quite suddenly, he made further discovery.

He did not mean to be unhappy. Vaguely he knew that he had something to contend with — something that he himself had nothing to do with, but that had everything in the world to do with him. If once he gave in to it, it would overcome him, but he was not going to give in to it. Whatever it was, he was going to live it down — more, he was going to turn it to account as the oyster turns grits to account, making pearls of them . . . turning them to enduring beauty.

And his discovery — his real discovery of which every other discovery was only a part? Outwardly it was a toy. Inwardly it was everything — literature, music (somehow), painting, sculpture (somehow), the joys and the joy of life. Anything that it was not, it stood for. It was the opening of all the doors.

A boy called Smith initiated him — a rather stupid boy with a cold in the head and a cow's-lick, who did not in the smallest degree himself understand. But he knew about the things, and of a shop, out of bounds for boarders, but accessible to day-boys like himself, where they could be bought.

"But what are they like?" David asked.

"Like real theatres, only very small."

David tried to imagine.

"How small?"

"Oh, not so very."

"But how big?"

"About as big as — Oh, I don't know."

"They've scenes?" said David.

"Rather. And side-wings."

"Side-wings." David thrilled at a new word. "You might tell me."

"I am telling you. You can get plays — lots. I don't think much of them. They're only for kids."

"But your pater had one."

"They're quite old things really, he says. You've heard of Mrs. Siddons. She's in some of the plays — they were made when she was alive."

"But do," said David, "tell me what they're like."

He was aflame to know now. Heaven knows what he saw, but he saw as clearly as Blake.

"Scenes," he said, "and what did you say? Yes, side-wings."

"There are foot-pieces, too, and top-drops."

David caught his breath.

Smith proceeded. No one had ever been so much interested in anything he said, or might have to say, before.

"My father says he spent all his pocket money on them when he was a boy. The characters are on sheets, you know, — plates they call them. Some of the scenes are meant to be cut out, you know, so that you can see through them."

David thought of the pantomime. He believed he knew.

"Like the transformation scene."

"There are transformation scenes."

"Pantomimes?"

It seemed there were pantomimes.

After that David could not rest till he should see what Smith had described, or, more exactly, had not described. Smith was disappointing. He was only interesting because he knew of the things, and he was not interesting because he was not interested.

"They're only for kids," he repeated from time to time. He had rather a contempt for them. But David was sure. He ceased to talk to Smith about them, and could not bring himself to ask the snuffling boy to go to the shop for him. The November evening when, breaking bounds, he went himself, marked a turning-point in his life. Everything led to it — the shadow over his life, of the existence of which school had now caused him to become dimly conscious; the early wanderings; Katinka certainly and the

actings, with the brothers Grimm behind those, and the wonders of the unfamiliar Bible to follow them; and many, many other mysteries besides these. All the external things, yes, but something deeper; something, in truth, in David himself. He entered the shop with a beating heart.

CHAPTER V

THE shop was very dark. It was in a back street. A single candle lighted the window, and a smoky oil lamp stood on the counter.

David stood looking into the window for some moments before he went in. Cheap writing-materials were what it held chiefly — paper, pens of various rather unattractive sorts, inks of two or three colours, hard pink blotting-paper which did not look absorbent. There were other things; bottles of gum, rulers, a dusty writing-desk or two, and many things on cards — cards with gaps on them where this or that had been sold.

The light of the candle was very dim, but not dim enough to have obscured what he sought, if it had been there. It was not there. He went in.

A bell tinkled as he opened the door, and continued to tinkle long after it had closed itself and he stood shyly behind it. No one came for a minute or so, and he had time to look about him. The stock was meagre and had an air of being dusty. There was a window at the back of the shop with a red rep curtain on the farther side of it, but this was drawn so that he could not see into the room beyond it. There was a rep curtain also over the glazed half of the door beside the window. No sign of life.

He was startled when the bell tinkled suddenly behind him, and an old man entered from the street.

The old man eyed him, and said, "What is it?" curtly, as if a customer was not at all what he wanted to see, and then, making odd little protesting noises, went round behind the counter, where, with his back for a moment to David, he put something away on a shelf out of sight. He turned, then, to the waiting David with another "What is it?" but, before David could answer him, he volunteered

that David was one of the College Boys and that he did n't sell fireworks.

"I don't want fireworks," said David.

"Nor sweets," said the old man.

"I don't want sweets," said David. "I want — do you sell — I mean, have you got — I don't exactly know what you call them —"

"Nobody comes for an hour-and-a-half," said the old man — "upwards of that — and then when I only so much as step over to the chemist's for a spot of peppermint for my indigestion, and have n't been gone not half a minute, the blessed bell goes for somebody as, to the best of my belief, does n't know what he does want! If it is n't fireworks, young gentleman, what is it? Python's Eggs I do keep. Everybody pleased. Roars of Innocent Amusement and No Danger. Just a match to the Egg (don't tell *me* y' don't want something with scrope for playing with matches!) and the Serpent uncoiling to a length of Upwards of Two Feet, *vide* printed Directions, though I would n't go measuring. *They're* a penny if I've got any left. If it's tobacco I don't keep it, nor would n't feel myself justified in selling it to you if I did."

He was meant to laugh then? He laughed and began to explain, but he had n't got further than "Plays, you know — scenes, characters," when a hand was thrust across the counter to him and his own gripped tremulously.

"At last!" the old man was saying, and David felt as one who has been found after long search and is 'acclaimed'! "Somebody asks for the Juvenile Drama — somebody comes in and ackshally *asks*. You'll excuse me, young gentleman. Ackshally *asks!* You'll pardon an old man making so bold. The Juvenile Drama! Skelt's, Redington's, Webb's, Park's — Skelt's! there's a name for you! there's a sound! It has been music to many in its time. But now. Where's boys with the — the Soul for it? Yes, the Soul. And it's a boy's toy (though mind y' *I*

don't really call it a toy) — but a boy's, mark me, whatever it is, for I never yet met a female who rightly understood, much less appreciated it. They — females — might play with it, like they play with dolls. It's a boy has the feeling. I *know*. Why, don't I remember? I used to tremble. Nothing else in all my life give me the thrill. It's a kind of — but I need n't tell you. *You* know. I ought to recognised you at once. I ought to sensed you the moment I come into the shop — the moment I set eyes on you."

"But I don't know," said David, rather breathlessly, so bewildered was he. "I want to. I've only heard of them. I've never seen one."

"He's never seen one," said the old man to the dusty stock and the ceiling. "He's never seen one. But he will know. And let me tell you I envy you. Yes, with the accumulated wisdom and experience of a lifetime I envy you. You wait. You'll know right enough, and, unless I'm very much mistaken (which I never am, I may say), before you're many minutes older. But —" he broke off — "where did you hear of them, and what brought you to me?"

"A boy told me of them. He said you kept them. He did n't care for them."

"What did I tell you! That's why I've took 'em out of the window. What's the good? Nobody worthy of 'em, that's what I said to myself. Let's put 'em away. A dying industry. In another ten or fifteen years there's no one'll have heard of them. There'll be imitations, mind, *in* toyshops — all they're fit for — German conglomerations — with Op'ra wrote over them. . . . Op'ra! . . . and no more like them than a Baptist Chapel is like St. Paul's Cathedral. But the real thing —"

"Oh, could n't I see them?" said David. He was burning with excitement now. Though he did not understand half the old man had said to him, he knew that what he was to be shown would be to him all that the old man predicted — that in this sense he was, from the old man's

point of view, at least not one of the wholly unworthy. The old man put on a pair of spectacles, looked at him, nodded his head two or three times smiling, and turned to a drawer behind him. He pulled it out and proceeded to take from it what seemed to the feverish David to be an infinity of baulking, tiresome, exasperating things — sheets of cardboard, foolscap and drawing-paper, packets of dish-papers, curling-papers, and what-indeed-not? — before a largish brown paper parcel was brought to view. This the old man lifted to the counter. He pulled the string which bound it, and David felt his heart give a leap.

Well, he was n't disappointed. The old man, fingering this and that lovingly, and watching him, was n't disappointed either.

"'Stage-Front,'" David read, "'Redington's.'" And something about Building higher than any other published at a larger price. "What does Building mean? And look here. It says Flat or Built. What is Built?"

The old man explained how that, when the stage-front was mounted on cardboard, certain cuttings and bendings would sink the opening and bring the boxes into position.

"Bevel it and make it solid-like, see? As if it really was built. You can buy 'em all ready done, stage and all. But you take my advice. I'll draw you out a little plan, and when you go home for the holidays you get a carpenter to make your own stage for you. You can have it deeper then. More scrope for effects. More practicable. You won't be able to do much at school, I don't expect. Pasting your scenes and characters on brown paper, and cutting out and such. You'll be impatient, I've no manner of doubt, to begin — to set to work-like, but if you'll believe me, the spirit of the thing, the real meaning is n't in all that at all. It's the things themselves. The names. *Pizarro*. There's a name for you. *Rolla* — look at him with the child when he has to cross the waterfall. I forget whose great part that was, but some one's. There's one

scene called The Temple of the Sun. And there's Dungeons. My goodness, the Dungeons! Chains, rings in the walls, barred windows."

It was certain that the old man knew.

David, round-eyed, looked and listened. He could have stayed for ever, but found suddenly to his dismay that it was now a quarter to five. The school gates were locked in the winter at five. He decided hurriedly on *Pizarro* (uncoloured), and, with this and a Stage-Front (coloured) pressed closely to him under his coat, and with promises, as much to himself as to the old man, to come again very soon, he took his hurried and excited flight.

Thus, in the little dark shop in the back street, upon this November evening, was found that which was to have its influence on far more than the short years which passed before, in the natural course, the thing itself — the outward and visible sign of all that it represented — was outgrown. What matter the form which the symbol may take? For one it is ships. Oh, the flat bit of wood with the mast and the sail of skewered paper — nay, earlier than this even, the paper boat itself which your grandmother, perhaps, knew how to make for you! From those a short cut maybe to the great ships which really go down to the sea. For another, engines. For a third, books. For David, all these probably, but now the thing which to his present young imagination (the appeal was to that!) embraced everything else. He hung over the sheets. Pizarro, Rolla, the Lady Elvira seated (an Empire couch if his memory serves him), Old Blind Man and Boy (the blindness represented by bandaged eyes), these and many others with their First Dress and Second Dress, and (but, for this, seek the Book, if haply in these degenerate days it may still be found) their Plate So-and-So, Figure So-and-So. Plate! Figure! The sound, as the old man had said, of words! Yes, and the type itself — several founts — the shape and the size of the letters in which the words with the inspiring sounds were printed! Difficult in after years

to apportion the various plays which passed through his hands to their several publishers. Was Pizarro Skelt? And here again magic! For the allurement of names and of the sound of words extended itself to the very addresses of these publishers. Skelt of Swan Street, Minories. What and where was — or were — Minories? Where, where, where? Webb sanctified Old Street, St. Luke's. Oh, the sound of St. Luke's in connection with Old Street! And Redington, of the fourpenny stage-front which built higher than any other published at sixpence, from his number in Hoxton Street, formerly, as a footnote to the plates took enthralling pains to explain, called Hoxton Old Town, turned Hoxton presently into the Mecca of David's wildest dreams. For all the length of the period over which the spell of the Juvenile Drama cast itself, his keenest desire was to see the enchanted spot whence came — where were born — the wonderful plates, the characters, scenes, sidewings, top-drops, and foot-pieces, which reached him in term-time by way of the little shop in the back street, and in the holidays by post. A name and a number dominated a considerable portion of an impressionable boyhood.

His dream while it was yet a dream was never realised. London, as we may suppose, gave him many delights; real theatres at Christmas-time, pantomimes anyway; the Aquarium (which had held a whale, though he does not remember to have seen that, and Zazel, whom he did see walking her wire blindfold, diving from the roof, and even fired from her cannon); the Crystal Palace, of course; Madame Tussaud's, heard of from afar even in the days of the wandering; the Zoölogical Gardens; the Baker Street Bazaar; but never Hoxton — or the Minories, or even Old Street, St. Luke's. Hoxton was out of every one's beat. Nobody, in Cheyne Walk, anyway, knew quite where it was, or how to get to it. You could n't take it on your walks, at all events. So, though never relinquishing hope, he employed the post and waited upon it. How he waited upon it . . . with what excitement hailed a double

knock in the distance, listened for a step, watched a figure by day, a jerking lamp by night! He could recall the face of a particular postman now for no other reason than that he brought, or did not bring, the parcel for which on some occasion or other he clamoured. He was not patient, or perhaps he learnt his first lessons in patience then. Boys had less pocket money in those days — the sons of the well-to-do with the rest — and additions to his repertory meant savings-up, small self-denials in other things. Yet, so deeply are the waitings impressed on his mind, that, for some time, each one of the holidays as it came must have seen the belated arrival of at least one play.

Names, names, names. It was Grimm over again and the magic of the golden things and the numbered things. *The Miller and his Men; The Blue Jackets* (with Admiral Trunnion, Ben Binnacle—names surely to set young blood coursing! — Fanny Trunnion, 'alias Lieutenant Firefly of the Skyrocket Fireship,' and an engaging Betsy Bodkin); *The Silver Palace* (Volcano, Lumina, Corla Crown); *Paul Clifford; The Waterman;* and—but here his mother, startled, searched in her memory for an allusion by that time no longer quite recent, and shewed an interest great almost as his own — the redoubtable *Baron Münchausen.*

Food for the young imagination, that is all, but would one thing have done as well as another — the ship, the engine? Not for David. Not for David, for whom his mother came to see, if she did not indeed see at once, that it had to be what it was. The very list stood for something — the list, that is, of the Hoxton Firm, for that was somehow the only one which ever came into his hands. Skelt and Webb and Park had been swallowed up already, perhaps? But he might read the names of twenty-three plays even there. These, the Hoxton Street list announced to have been Republished — an announcement which, as implying some earlier era, interested him keenly. *The Corsican Brothers* was amongst them, *The Brigand, Douglas, Timour the Tartar.*

And then, the twenty-three being finished, there followed a catalogue of names more thrilling, more enthralling still — if only by reason of three lines, which, prefacing it, put all that it held out of the reckoning.

"Having the Copper-Plates likewise of the following Plays," said Hoxton, "I shall Republish them also in due time, when they will always be kept in print, both plain and coloured, with Books complete."

And then the names — names to make his mouth water: *The Flying Dutchman; Belphegor; Rob Roy; The Red Rover* (oh, the Red Rover!); *Wapping Old Stairs; Wreck Ashore; Dred;* and *Sixteen-String Jack!* These were but a few of them.

Due time was not David's time. He might sigh for the moon. *Jack Sheppard* had sixty-four sheets! To have been able to possess them! To have been able only to see them! And *Red Rover*, Red Rover which ran like the refrain of a song in his head, and *Dred* (covering what?), and the beloved mysterious *Sixteen-String Jack!*

Not, it will be seen, just the thing itself. For the old man knew — knew David, anyway. He might have prophesied. Knowing so much he must know more, surely. There were Fire Pans at a penny, for your Red Fire; slides; footlights in shiniest tin at a penny a burner, and up to twelve burners. By the smell of the colza oil with which they were trimmed, and by the smell of the smoking of them when they smoked, and by the other linked and hallowed smells of the theatre in little, those notably of glue and paste, and (more subtle but still delectable) of paints with such names as Crimson Lake, Vermillion, Ultramarine, Burnt Umber, Burnt Sienna, Gamboge and Yellow Ochre, he, knowing these in common with David, might surely have prophesied.

What to say? That the little theatre would one day be changed for, nay, become, the big one? That David would be an actor? Or that he would follow beauty, search for it, find it?

He did say one day in the dark little shop that David would never look back.

"How look back?" asked David.

"Oh, I dunno. What comes will come out of this — whether it's acting in earnest, which it has been with some, or music, the piano or the voice or maybe the violin; or whether it's painting or sculpsher, or poetry. I could tell you what it won't be; but what it will, that's a different matter. In old age, pictures, I dare say, and china and an eye for the genuine thing. A collector, that's what it's come to with some. Prints especially, mezzotints or line-engravings — the eye trained perhaps by observing the differences in these. Ah, you've noticed that, have you! I thought so. Seen the difference between the drawings of *Don Quixote*, eh, and your favourite *Silver Palace?*"

David had. And the difference, too, between the easy lines of the graceful Bluejackets and the wooden clumsiness of the figures in the *Mistletoe Bough*. Not that he would have allowed himself really to call even the stumpy Lady Agnes wooden or clumsy. Good and bad, all shared the glamour. He perceived for all that; knew the quick from the dead; and how different a hand had drawn the characters in *Douglas*, Lady Randolph with the air which he came to think of later as 'Siddons,' Randolph, Glenalvon, the Stranger, and notably the Servant — blood, bone, muscle to each of them — from the hand which (though he loved *The Waterman*) could have perpetrated such a Wilhelmina, such a Robin, so monkey-faced a Tom Tug. He would have been Smith who did n't understand, not David at all, if he had n't been conscious of differences. But it is certain that the contemplation of the different hands, expressing themselves so differently in the different drawings, must already have begun to train his eye.

CHAPTER VI

UNLIKELY, one would have thought that the uncomfortable little incident which had marked the beginning of David's school-days should have come to his mother's knowledge. David unquestioned could never have spoken of it. It was through a question — through the very accident of the words in which he clothed it — that slumbering memories were stirred. The sequel was almost automatic.

Time was passing. The term-times and holidays came and went. David was twelve, was thirteen, and still the little theatre, which was the symbol of so much else, held him. She had looked to see it outgrown long since, but though it would be outgrown when it had served its purpose, that hour had not struck yet. Whither tending? Whereto all the thoughts too deep for words which it inspired in him? What was it doing to him and for him? Watching the engrossed boy generally, she asked herself these things.

One day, really watching him, she asked him.

"David."

"Yes, Mother."

"What are you going to be?"

There had been a pasting the day before — sheets of characters pasted on to sheets of brown paper, most of the household helping, and now David had begun to cut out. The cutting-out he liked to do unaided. He could trust no one else, his mother always excepted, with the minutenesses and intricacies of the delicate work.

"Does one have to be something?" he asked, and knew at once to a momentary dismay — or a dismay that was at least potential — that he had reminded himself of something which he wished to forget. "Can't one," he said after a pause, — "can't one just *be ?*"

"You would n't wish to be idle," his mother said.

David was n't so sure.

"Have you thought at all what you'd like to be?" she asked then.

David, cutting out more busily, said, "Oh, I don't know," and held the tip of his tongue between his teeth as his scissors effected a difficult manœuvre.

"Suppose I 'd cut off his sword," he said, the uncomfortable moment past.

It was actually Baron Münchausen upon whom he was working. She had seen the plates, as we know, and even the horse which was cut in two by the fall of the portcullis. Her thoughts, with the bisected steed for a mount, or perhaps David's scissors for a sort of broomstick, fled to Ettringham. She heard again Miss Ingoldby's snip, snip, snip; saw Lady Penstephen and her slop-basin; heard the sound of John's impetuous thrustings.

"But you'll have to, David. Don't the masters ever ask you?"

"No."

"But you ought to be working for something. What do you think you'd like to be?"

"Can I be what I like?"

"I don't say that, but it would be some sort of guide if we knew what your tastes were."

"Oh, I don't know," said David again; but he thought, all the same, that he did know.

Everything was leading him to the knowledge then; not the little theatre only; though, since he had had that for a symbol of the desired thing, the knowledge lay behind all that he did. There were times when he could hardly contain himself for the urgency of his feelings. Music told him — if, as is to be feared, he called everything that had a tune music, from the noises made by the dark-eyed little Piedmontese with the unmastered accordions with whom England swarmed just then, and those of the piano-organs, with their *Santa Lucia's* and their *Oh-my-Fie-For-Shame's*,

only beginning then to take the place of the *Voici-le-Sabre's* and the *Hearts-Bowed-Down* and the *When-Other-Lips*, of the groaning wooden-legged hurdy-gurdies, to the strains of the German bands which murdered Handel and Offenbach and Mozart and Verdi and Lecocq quite impartially everywhere. Music told him; books told him; things seen and things half-seen told him. He knew when he heard the lessons read in Chapel. Did n't this one or that of the monitors understand what he read, that the recital of things which made David's heart leap should be so savourless? He knew on Glee Club nights when his soft treble ('tremble' might really sometimes have been the word here!) took its part in *Oh, who will o'er the downs so free?* and *See our oars with feathered spray*, and *Row, Brothers, Row*, and — the Glee Club, like many another, using the Harrow Glee Book — Katinka's *Wanderlied* and Katinka's *Lorelei*, and (but shorn of its exquisite crumpled paper accompaniment!) Katinka's *Mill*. Goodness! He knew then. There could be only one outlet for the feelings with which he was blessed or burdened.

Not David's words any of these, you will understand. All that he felt was still inarticulate. He only knew that he did feel, and that somehow, ultimately, what he felt, or what he had the power of feeling, would have to be expressed. When as a smaller boy he had seen a circus and had wanted to be a circus rider and jump through a hoop, or, by a jigging of his arms, balance himself on his buttocks in a slipping position on the extreme slope of the cantering horse's near hind-quarter, or to be a trapeze performer and fly from swinging bar to swinging bar in mid-air, while the audience held its breath and even the band stopped, it was the same compelling need that had been there. The little theatre appeased it. He could be Pizarro, you see, or Rolla, or Coral Crown with the golden-scale armour, or Volcano whose pictured lines were so beautiful even in defeat. The Let's Pretend of the nursery days? Not quite that. Or else that so thoroughly, so completely, as

to endue simulation with the divine properties of creation. The gods that David would have made in the likeness of men would all, as Galatea for Pygmalion, have come to life.

But to his mother's question he could only say that he did n't know.

"Soldier?"

He shook his head.

"At least I should like to be one. But I'm not one."

"How, David?"

"I don't know. I don't believe I am."

"The Navy, then?"

Again David found himself reminded of the incident of his first term. The uncomfortable moment had returned. It was also, this time, not a moment.

He grew red quite suddenly, to his mother's surprise, and then, to something more than her surprise, gradually rather white. She made a little rapid movement, a leaning of her body towards him, but did not speak. He went on cutting out, but, conscious probably of her eyes upon him, no longer easily.

What had she said? She reviewed the few brief sentences spoken in the last few minutes, seeking any possible cause in them for what she was observing, and could find none. Had he been twitted with the need of a goal, of an aim or a purpose? — told that he was n't of the stuff that soldiers or sailors were made of? She did not think so. He was n't a fighter, but he was stubborn on occasion and had plenty of courage. He could hold his own, she believed, if his opponents played fairly. But opponents? She had no reason to suppose that, in the sense of adversaries, there were any.

He looked up, irked, maybe, by the tension.

"You're quite happy at school, David, are n't you?"

"Yes, Mother, of course."

She was not satisfied. Her eyes, with a reminiscence in them of the look they used so often to wear, were questioning him.

"Tell me, David."

"Tell you what, Mother?"

"Why you — why you —" No, she could n't put it that way. "Tell me," she said gently, "what's the matter."

"Nothing's the matter, Mother."

And so obviously something was, or something had been!

She would have liked to say, "David, you're keeping something back from me," but shrank before the possibility of endangering their confidence in each other, by seeming to press for what, if it was to have any value at all, must be given.

"Get me a pair of scissors and I'll cut out too," she said instead. "You'll find a pair in my workbasket. It's on the chest of drawers in my room."

So she eased the stress. But what could it have been . . . ? The Army . . . the Navy . . . and at once the changing of colour followed by the constraint, which, though it shewed itself in no faltering of his eyes when she met them, was none the less palpable to beings at least as sensitive to atmospheres and influences as she was and as she knew him to be. And, as she threw her mind back over the trifling events of the last few minutes, had she not been vaguely sensible of something of the same sort a few minutes earlier?

He left the room and she heard his feet on the polished stairs. She looked at the sheets of characters on their brown paper, which all night had lain pressing under heavy books to flatten them after the day before's pasting, and at the little shower of clippings, brown and white, on the table and on the floor under where David had been sitting, as if from these things she might discover a clue to what was puzzling and disturbing her.

"Does one have to be something?" It had been upon that. His funny little "Can't one just *be*" had been in the nature of a recovery. She built up the scene once more:

David, the light on his hair, bending a little over his scissors, and in his face the absorbed expression that it always wore when he was doing work that interested him. What . . . ?

Well, she would not ask. When he came back he found his own scissors in her hands, and her attention fixed upon the figure she was cutting out.

"I wonder whether the screen at Ettringham is finished," she said.

"I could have helped with it, could n't I, Mother?"

She went into his room that night to tuck him up as she used to do when he was a little boy. She lingered a little, hoping that he would tell her then, but he did not.

"Well, good-night, darling."

"Good-night."

He called her back as she was closing the door, but it was only to ask her to sing *Annie Laurie* and *Hunting Tower*, two of his favourites of her songs, and to leave the drawing-room door open.

And he could not have told you why he could not tell her! It was as it had been when he had kept silence after he had seen the two ladies on the seat at Homburg, on the day of his mother's illness when he had taken his memorable walk with his father. His mother in turn kept silence. Time was when she would have unburdened her heart to David's father, but she could not do this so freely now, and the odd little incident added itself to the sum of those things which she kept in her heart.

The explanation came to her months later, and then once more by a changing of colour upon the part of a bigger David, and a putting of two and two together upon her own.

They had met a school-fellow of David's, and David's mother heard her son's nickname for the first time.

"Sir Thingamy P.," she said. "Is that what they call you?"

His mother was 'not thinking,' as we say, or she would not have asked why they called him that.

"Oh, I don't know," said David; "I suppose because of Father."

He was furious with himself as he felt himself growing red.

Her attention was arrested.

"Your father?"

David nodded. "They always ask a new boy what his father is, you know. Why, I do now. Everybody always does."

Even then she might not have got her clue if David, stumbling a little, — fumbling, anyway, for words, because he was conscious that he was giving himself away, — had not explained himself a little further. "What he's in, you know."

She had it now. How simple it was. The Army or the Navy, and David's father not in either. What was he, then? She could construct that scene as easily as she had reconstructed the other — as easily, indeed, as if she had witnessed it. David, a little shy new boy, and the inquisitors. They knew, then, and David, who had said nothing at home, had been through the fire!

For a moment she felt stunned.

But did they? She looked at him quickly. He was up to her shoulder now — growing, she thought, every day. Already he had a separate existence from hers. What experiences were his in that other life which was hidden from her? Did they know? And did he? And (miserable indecision for her, here), what did she wish?

"But why should they call *you* Sir Thingamy?" She heard herself asking at last and even contriving a bantering tone. "Your father, yes: if they ever had occasion to speak of him, I could understand — impertinent little

wretches! — their calling him Sir Thingamy. But why you?"

David wanted to get off the subject. He looked about as if in the material objects around him he might find aid, means of escape from it, means whereby he might change it. He found none, though it was in Battersea Park they were walking, and Battersea Park abounded in interests.

"Oh," he said, "I don't know." The phrase held him and he was conscious of that too — of seeming to have nothing else for an answer to every question. "I suppose because — oh, I don't know."

He broke off and looked at the river. His mother did not speak. She did not look at him. She was determined that nothing should be forced from him. She too looked at the river. They both stopped and leant on the railing. But because she did not speak he had to.

"Because — I suppose, because some day I shall be . . ."

His mother caught her breath with a little sound.

"Myself," he finished with a little gulp. "They meant after years and years, of course, when I'm quite old."

The sword turned in Mary's heart. They did n't know, then, or, at any rate, he did n't. But she felt suddenly that she wished fervently that he did. She breathed quickly for a few moments, and, to steady herself, closed her hand upon the railing. David, suspecting nothing, did not observe her. The discomfort of the last minute or two — a discomfort which he would yet have had great difficulty to account for or explain — had, he supposed, been all his.

"It was only a silly joke, you see," he said, dismissing the whole thing; and, eased of it, and as conscious of relief as one who puts down a load, he moved away a few paces and looked for pebbles to throw into the water.

But Mary leaning upon the railing was beset by a very torture of perplexity. This was perhaps the moment for telling him? Now while he would imperfectly understand

and so imperfectly realise. Perhaps never again would so favourable, nay, so easy, an opportunity occur. She had only to call him to her now and to say, "David, you never will be Sir Thingamy P." — even the 'Sir Thingamy' to her hand to soften the blow it must deal, to give a lulling appearance of comedy to the tragedy, and so ward off the pain of knowledge till the mind should have accustomed itself to the idea! — "not in the years and years, not even when you're quite quite old." For, oh, he would get accustomed to the idea. Sooner or later he must be told, and with all her heart she believed, now, that the telling ought, on every count, to be sooner rather than later.

"David."

She had called to him. She had heard herself call to him. She was going to tell him, then?

"*You* did n't say that? You did n't say that, yourself I mean — about some day becoming — succeeding —"

"No, Mother. Of course not."

His face had clouded again. He looked at the pebbles he was holding and threw one of them, and ran to the railing to watch for the ring that should mark its fall. It was probably forbidden to throw stones into the river, she thought, and, part of her mind detaching itself as it were from the contemplation of the problem which exercised her so mercilessly, she wondered, with that part of it, why a park-keeper, who was standing some forty or fifty yards off and must see him, did not interfere. Then she knew that she wished that he would interfere. And then she knew that she was wavering; that — coward that her love made her! — she wanted to gain time; and that to gain time was to lose it.

And then, desperately, her whole mind attacked the problem afresh. Dare she spare herself? All David's life was involved. And though it was plain that he himself did not know, it was by no means certain that those who had bestowed his nickname upon him did not know. There might be nothing more in the incident than he of his igno-

rance supposed, or there might be a malice which as yet had not revealed itself. Was there? and did he all ignorantly somehow suspect it? For, clear as it was that the circumstances that had attended the schoolboy questionings had taught him nothing, it was at least equally clear that he looked back upon them, for some reason or other, with distaste, and that he could only bring himself to allude to them with a very real reluctance.

Then, now, surely! Now when the iron was hot; or the wax was soft; or the twig would bend without breaking.

And then — and all in the few moments during which, outwardly calm, she stood clutching the railing — a thought of John, and, and in the light of other thoughts which came in its train, a sudden check! Had she, without consulting the boy's father, the right to tell him? Ought she upon her own responsibility to take a step from which there would be no returning? The thoughts thronged her now, each as it came involving another. John and she were one. No real barrier could have raised itself between them. She saw him as she had seen him at Homburg, leaning over her, when she came back to life after her illness, the tears of his inexpressible relief and thankfulness in his eyes, felt his head bowed beside her on the bed, his hands gathering her hands into his — Christ's simile, the simile for all time of protective sheltering love — as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and knew that there could be no barrier between them. To act independently of him would be to acknowledge, nay, to establish, the existence of what did not exist, and she had been on the point of doing this. She held her breath for a moment and closed her eyes. David, as before, found himself released.

But both came in from their walk a little older than when they had started out for it an hour or so earlier. Both, in their different ways, had the feeling of having passed through something which left them not quite where they had been before. For David, mysteries seemed to be in

the air, the ground not quite solid as heretofore under his feet; for Mary, nothing new, it was true, but a new aspect for old misgivings and fears and perplexities. The sending of David to school seemed now to have been like sending him into the world alone and unequipped to fend and to fight for himself. Well, he would have all his life perhaps to fight for himself. Better that he should begin from the first. But fight blindfold?

David, the elasticity of youth helping, recovered himself quickly. He had, moreover, always, refuges into which he could creep. Betsy, as we may or may not remember, had instanced sleep. That boy, she had said, would always be able to sleep. But sleep was only for the night. A book was his particular entrenchment at this moment. He was reading Ainsworth's *Tower of London*, and once more we may envy him. His mother, recovering herself less quickly, but recovering herself, nevertheless, for the knowledge, perhaps, that, whatever happened, she of necessity must keep going, saw him curled up on the leather sofa in the schoolroom, the book on the arm of it, one of his own arms half round the volume, the other supporting his absorbed head as he bent over it, and knew that all was well with him. But he would have to be told. Upon that point she had no hesitations. She would speak to his father that evening.

CHAPTER VII

SHE spoke after dinner, as she had spoken before when it was only a piano that she wanted.

John was reading just as he had been reading then, and she knitting. She had even a book upon her knee. And she was not reading or attempting to read. For the background of Frau Finkel's room, with the grained woods and the looking-glasses, there was the very different background of the panelled room in Cheyne Walk, with its long windows and its pilasters, and its beautiful old hob fireplaces with the reed backs.

A few words — nine, was it? — had settled the matter of the piano. She did not think that a few words would settle this. She searched in her mind how best to begin, and while she was deliberating he looked up. Something in her expression arrested his attention.

"What is it, Mary?"

"I want to talk to you, John."

"Something worrying you?"

She nodded. She rolled up her knitting, and, putting it into her book, pushed both away from her.

"It's about David."

"What's he been doing?" he asked.

He put down his book, but did not close it.

"It's not anything that he's been doing," Mary said. "It's what we've done, or rather what we have n't done. John," she leaned forward a little, "what is your plan about David?"

"In what way?"

He too leaned forward a little.

"I learnt something to-day which brought things home to me. I've been wanting to speak to you about him for a long time. Somehow I have n't been able."

"What is it you learnt, Mary?"

"Oh, a very small thing in itself. There may be nothing in it. But there may be everything. Only his nickname at school."

And at the sound of its ridiculous syllables as she pronounced them to his father, it did seem to her for a moment that there could be no cause for misgiving in what was so frankly absurd.

John laughed as he heard it, and she even laughed a little too.

"Sir Thingamy P.," he said. "So that's what they call him."

But any comic aspect the name might have, vanished with his next words. "I suppose they do know," he said gravely. "It would be surprising if they did n't."

He saw, then, as she did.

"Yet," she said, "they certainly have n't told him that they do, for it is evident that he does n't. And that's the point. They're bound to know, probably many of them do already, and so it's bound to come to his ears, and if it comes that way — John, it must n't come that way! — baldly, brutally, perhaps. It's unthinkable!"

There was silence when she had spoken. The house itself seemed quite still. Then faint sounds, telling of life in the more distant parts of it, reached her; the muffled clattering of plates and dishes from below, and perhaps an almost indistinguishable jingle of silver or of glass; the poking of the kitchen fire and the hooking-up or the replacing of rings in the kitchen grate; the opening of a door and a rapid series of little calls to the cat of the moment, and then the shutting and the locking of the door and the shooting of bolts; and, from upstairs, the footfall of a soft-shod Matilda doing the rooms, and a still fainter sound which was the whirr of Betsy's sewing-machine. These things, like the faint noises in Frau Finkel's house on the night when we heard them but she in her trance did not, only made the stillness seem more complete.

"We must remember," John said, breaking the silence at last, "that so far David's ignorance has protected him. It did certainly when they were questioning him — when they were asking him what I was. If he had known then, it would have been much more difficult for him."

"Ah, yes, then, maybe, but it would n't protect him again. That it did was an accident. Now he would be at their mercy. But what had you thought of doing, John? You have had some plan. You're wiser than I am. When had you thought it would be best to tell him?"

The words might have sounded impatient in any other tone than that in which she spoke them. On her own account she would have been no more capable of impatience with David's father than of sarcasm. No doubt of his wisdom would ever have entered her mind.

"Do you want him told?"

"I think he ought to be told at once. I nearly told him this afternoon. I would have, I think, if I could have had your consent. Would you have given it?"

David's father closed his book and began to pace the room. Mary watched him as he walked the length of it and then walked back, halting to take up and to put down things that she did not think he even saw. A black horn paper-knife inlaid with ivory — a hind and fawn feeding — was one of such objects. She feared that he would break it, but he put it down unharmed.

"He hated talking about it? What made you think that?"

"Oh, it was easy enough to see that. That was why I thought at first that he must know; but he does n't."

"You're quite certain he does n't?"

"Quite certain."

"Boys are odd creatures, remember, — shy with their parents to a degree that's unbelievable."

"David is n't shy with me, and, no John, he truly does n't know. I wish now that I had told him to-day. I should be sitting here with an easier mind."

He had not answered her question. There was an earlier question which he had not answered either, and this one, conscious, now, that she was pressing him, but urged by the stress of her anxieties, she asked him again.

"What *had* you meant to do, John?"

He stopped in his pacing and drew a chair up to hers.

"Do you remember a talk we had the night we arrived in London?" he said slowly.

Yes, Mary remembered it; every word that had been spoken, she thought.

"You were very unhappy that night — do you remember how we had to remind ourselves that we could n't have foreseen the circumstances that had placed us in the position in which we found ourselves then? . . . the position which made you so unhappy. It's all in that still. From our point of view we had n't done wrong. In the result we just could not help ourselves. We could n't have averted, as we could n't have foreseen, what had happened. Well, Mary, I had my plan, as you say, clearly enough defined and fixed before that — before we married, that is, and before the unlikely things happened and I stepped so unexpectedly into Joseph's shoes. It was all quite simple then. The children would have grown up to know the protest their parents had thought it right to make. As soon as they could have understood it, we should have explained it to them. They would have been prepared for it. It would have come to them quite naturally and they would have accepted it as naturally. Things which we could no more control than we could foresee changed all that."

He had no plan, then. The circumstances, he meant, admitted now of no plan. He was trying to spare her, she knew that; trying to comfort her too, as he had tried to comfort her before. She could never forget what he had done for her, the great instance of his love for her — that and a hundred others. But he had no plan.

"What had you thought, Mary?"

"I was waiting for my boy's father to speak to me."

"We could only both wait. We have to face this, dear. We've faced things before."

"Together," Mary said. "But this — oh, it's David who has to face this."

The cry was wrung from her.

"Mary, dearest, think. What could have been done? Could he have been told before he went to school? Would it, at his age then, have been possible to tell him?"

She knew that it would not.

"Then what could we have done but wait?"

She had to admit that they could have done nothing else.

"But now," she said. "You do think he ought to be told now? You would have consented to my telling him to-day if I had been able to ask you? You would n't have thought I had acted wrongly if I had told him?"

"No. I don't think I should ever think you had acted wrongly about anything. But I should see a very different David going back to school."

Mary turned harassed eyes on him.

"Why different?"

"A sort of Ishmael. His hand against every man because he suspected every man's hand to be against him. Don't you see, Mary? He'd become self-conscious too — think every one's eye was on him, and that every one was talking of him before his face and behind his back. He would n't have an easy moment at school — I'm thinking of my school-days — and you would n't either. Oh, you'd know. You'd know at a hundred miles distance if he was unhappy. Would n't you? You'd know from the other side of the world."

"I think I should," said Mary.

"Then, do you see why?" said David's father.

Late into the night they talked. One or other of the three lamps, with what David called the clockwork insides, gave a little click at times, or an inward gurgle.

John sometimes resumed his pacing and sometimes sat still.

"Not tell him?" Mary said at last.

"I should wait. If they know, he'll know, and I don't think it would spare him very much if he did know before they told him. They may never tell him, though that, I grant you, is very unlikely."

"But he'll have to know even if they don't tell him."

"He will know," said David's father.

If she could but be certain of something else! If she could but feel once more the unshakeable confidence that she had placed in her husband's judgment, and — shrink as she would from the thought — in her husband himself before he had become her husband! Was he not, had he never been, as strong as she in her worship of him had supposed him? "He for God only — she for God in him." Oh, she was ready to admit her dependence. But had he not been for God at all — taking 'God' in this sense to mean all that they had always been agreed that 'God' meant— and had the God in him failed her? It was not her fault that such doubts — no, they were still but shadows of doubts — should assail her. She beat them back, but they returned again and again to the assault. Ettringham, with all that had happened there, — all, indeed, that Ettringham stood for, — had affected her more than she knew. The christening, with its solemn ritual, the family prayers, assentings, silences that gave assent, — what were these but public recantings of all that had been held sacred? Not that in her heart of hearts David's mother did not welcome these things in themselves. The consolations which religion had to offer had long since ceased to be to her as vain things, and with poor faithful Betsy, she had, as we have seen, desired them, and desired them ardently, for her children. But — ah, the But remained. Could she forget that, by implication at least, John, in consenting to accept the Church's ministrations on behalf of the son of his tardy marriage, swept away all that had

sanctified her own former state, or even saved it from being indeed what those who had hurt her so grievously had thought it?

So the hours went by. Twelve struck, and one. All the sounds in the house had ceased, the servants long ago in their beds and sleeping the sleep of finished labour, or, maybe equally soundly, the sleep of labour shamelessly scamped. David slept; Georgina; and Johnny — Johnny of the assured position, of the one unassailable right to a place in the scheme of things and to a name of his own.

"My poor children," Mary said to herself. "My poor three children."

And so, like Pepys, to bed. Nothing was settled — what could be? — unless it may be said to have been settled that David was not to be told. But, as at the very last moment Mary reserved the right to tell him herself, if, in her judgment, an occasion should urgently arise, even this was not definitely settled. And that anything that concerned David so intimately and so tragically should be left undecided, and thus to chance or accident, seemed to his mother of all things most horrible.

Well, for to-night she could think no more, nor, worn out with suffering, even suffer any more. She sat for some minutes on the side of her bed, too tired even to begin to undress.

As she sat so she heard a little sound from David's room, which was on the same floor. She pulled herself together and listened. It was repeated. It was only a little cough; nothing — a mere clearing of the throat.

Hardly knowing what she was doing she slipped from the room and across the passage, but as her hand was on the latch of the door she knew what she was going to do. If he was awake she was going to tell him. He sat up in bed as she crossed the threshold.

She went over to him quickly and put her arms round

him. She had not brought her candle with her, but the blind was up and the room was not wholly dark.

"David," she said quickly, without giving herself time to think, "you know what you told me to-day about — about succeeding — about becoming Sir Thingamy P. yourself some day. You're not counting on it, are you?"

"No," he said shortly, and then said "No" again.

"Because — I've something to tell you, David, something you must know . . ."

He said "Yes," in the same way.

Her arms closed more tightly round him. He was strong and firm, and gave promise of fine development in the next few years. She knew suddenly that there would be shelter for her head upon his shoulder when all the storms should have passed over her. At the same moment she felt a slight tremor pass through him.

"Is that you, Mother?"

She held him from her that she might look at him.

"Have n't you heard what I've been saying?"

He shook his head.

"What time is it?"

"But you answered me."

He shook his head again. She thought for a moment and then said absently — "Very late, darling, — nearly half past one."

"You did n't hear me come in?" she said after a pause.

"No. Why did you? Why are n't you in bed?"

"Your father and I have been talking."

"What about?"

"Oh, you, perhaps."

Even now she was half minded to tell him.

But he spoke.

"I'll tell you what I really want to be, Mother."

"What darling?"

"You promise you won't try to prevent me?"

"I can't promise that, David."

"You can promise that you'll think about it?"

"We're sure to do that, your father and I, whatever it is."

"I want to be — No, I think I won't tell you to-night, Mummy."

"Very well, darling. In your own good time. Perhaps things are better not told on impulses, or for that matter in the middle of the night."

She smiled in the darkness as she kissed him, and then, conscious suddenly of the deadly fatigue which had held her, and which now as a fog that rolls back enveloped her once more, body and mind, clogging her movements and clouding her brain, she dragged herself painfully and with great effort from the room, and across the landing to her own!

CHAPTER VIII

THE day of her walk with David and of her talk with his father was the day when Mary reached the second of the three stages of her pilgrimage. From being a young woman she entered then, definitely, upon the period of her middle-age.

Not all at once did the signs of this make themselves generally apparent. Not for many years yet was her girlish figure to lose its slenderness or its flowing lines. But it was from this day that grey hairs began to show themselves in the thick brown strands and the shining coils that were Betsy's pride. From the morning when Betsy said, "Why, if you have n't got some grey hairs, m'lady!" (while as yet they were countable, and even counted!) to the day when Betsy's moan, "Why, you're *going* grey, m'lady, — absolutely *going grey*," was almost accusatory in its protesting vehemence, seemed but a short time.

Betsy, far more concerned than her mistress, pointed this out.

"Very likely, Betsy. One can't keep young for ever."

"But at your age, m'lady. Why, 'm, at your age, even I'd hardly began. Of course I've been pepper-and-salt for some years, but think of the difference between you, 'm, and me — and me a working woman into the bargain. A lady has no call to go grey till years and years older than you are."

David's mother smiled.

"It's what goes on inside one's head that settles how long the colour of the outside of it is to last, I suppose."

"I've never held much with washes or lotions," Betsy said, "but if this continues I shall have to look out for something — I can see — make enquiries, anyway."

"I'll use no messes," said David's mother. "If I'm to be grey I'm to be grey."

It became plain that she was to be grey. Before she was fifty, — but this is to look forward a long way, of course, — quite grey. In time, Betsy, deploring as long as there remained any hope, had to admit that the greyness was very becoming. Her mistress, indeed, was only exchanging one beauty for another.

Her face was subtly altering too. All that the years had written upon it was beginning to be perceptible now in faint but indisputable lines. David, when he was old enough to read the writings of the years, was to understand why the beauty of the face was never diminished by them. Rather, he sometimes thought, did their presence enhance it. Nothing ignoble was written there, nothing small, nothing selfish. But before he was old enough to understand fully, he was to become conscious of the changes that had begun.

Mary had never had very much colour, but it was now that her cheeks began to assume the ivory whiteness which was the tone of her complexion in all her later life. Her skin never lost the fineness of its texture. It was always clear as wax. The pallor which it now wore had no look of ill-health.

She was, however, not so strong as before. This shewed itself in many small ways. Johnny had grown very quickly too big for her to carry. He now became too big for her to lift. From "Goodness, what a heavy boy!" it was a short step to "No, Johnny, too great a weight altogether for your poor old mother." Johnny was, thus, in after years never to be able to remember, as David and Georgina always could, a young mother at all. To him, to his unconscious loss, parents and guardians — fathers, mothers, Betsys — were all equally elderly persons of certainly no like passions with himself. She could not read out for hours at a stretch. It was Georgina who claimed the readings now — Georgina for the attentive listener who used to be David, with Johnny for the Georgina who had played about on the floor of old, half listening and half

occupied with other diversions. She read often till her voice failed, but it failed sooner than it used, and then she had to put the book aside —the *Arabian Nights* (expurgated) or *The Swiss Family Robinson*, or *Holiday House*, or, later, *The Wide Wide World*, as the case might be — and confess herself unable to go on. Her step, at the outset, at least, lost nothing of its spring. She was as ready as ever for the walks with David, which were always her chief delight in the holidays that brought him back to her three times a year, but presently David noticed that there began to be days when he had to adapt his pace to hers, as once in turn his father had had to adapt (but had not adapted!) his pace to David's.

"Tired, Mummy?"

"No, darling, but your legs are getting longer than mine" (as, with the coming of each fresh holidays, they indeed were), or, "No, darling, but I'm not growing younger," and sometimes even "Yes, darling, a little."

So the changes came and time went on. Nor were the changes only in Mary. She for her part saw plenty. With her they had begun in, and on, a day; that was all.

But a thing that gave Mary extraordinary pleasure at this time was the devotion that she began to observe as existing increasingly between David and his little brother. Johnny, from the moment when he had been able to distinguish one person from another, had shewn unmistakeable signs of a predilection for David, and David had spasmodically responded, but of late it had become apparent that the attraction had become mutual, and that in each case it had drawn to itself a whole-hearted and genuine affection. This could not but make Mary happy. One of her fears had always been that her sons should dislike one another. It had seemed to her sometimes that two persons of one parentage, so strangely placed, could not fail — all ignorant as they might be of their position — to have some deep-lying mistrust of each other. This fear had been laid

now for good. It rested perhaps upon no very reasonable foundations. It had been real enough, for all that. David coming back to London, or only perhaps from a walk, would call for Johnny. Johnny, regardless of the feelings of those who had been playing with him, or looking after him, would fly to David — and from no matter what. Behold Johnny pick-a-back then, his arms tight round his brother's throat, proud as a peacock, and shouting the house down!

"David, you'll spoil him, I can never get him to be good when he's been with you."

David would laugh, showing his white young teeth.

"Then call for me, Mother, and I'll make him good!"

"I'll be good, for David," Johnny had the impudence to say once. But to that David answered immediately, "You'll jolly well be good, for your mother!"

The supreme proof of David's power was that David could, if need were, even make him take medicine! Betsy, when a pill or a powder was the grim order of the day or night, made no scruple to call for David when he was there, or upon his name when he was n't.

Calm once more; the trivial round, the common task. But it was another sort of calm. Resignation was in it, and even renouncement. Mary, whether against her better judgment or not she no longer knew, had given in to waiting. She had not spoken to David. She did not even yet know whether he knew.

How little in some ways she did know of him. He was franker, perhaps, than most boys, but a whole side of his life was hidden from her. She guessed vaguely at the difficulties which must have beset him, and at which we have glanced. He never told her of these. They were, as she divined, the things that he could not have brought himself to speak of. She never heard of the purgatory of the early Chapels. She heard of the beauty that he discovered in the services, and the delight which the poetry of the newfound Bible was to him. They talked of those things

often. What were his young religious views? She dared not ask him outright. There was the term which saw his confirmation. How anxious she had been then. His father had raised no objections when the head master, who of course did know, had written to him on the subject of this. He had replied in a letter which he had shown to her, making all easy by leaving the matter to the discretion of the authorities and to the feeling of the boy himself. "Your son," came the answer, "seems to wish it, and I think we should be guided by that." John wrote that he had no more to say. And David was confirmed.

But, oh, what lay behind it all? There must have been heart-searchings for him, as there were heart-searchings for her then. She envied other mothers whom no doubts assailed. They at least could pray for their sons at such times. She too could pray, and did pray, we may be sure, but, oh, to have had, as they had, a Person to address! And to have been able, as they, she supposed, were able, to talk on these matters openly, and, from her own greater knowledge, give counsel and help.

She looked for signs of some notable spiritual experience when she saw David next. But she found no difference in him, and was perplexed, and then somehow thankful. Not yet was she left behind. But it puzzled her sometimes, and even sometimes made her unhappy, that he asked her no questions.

Why did he not comment to her on his own upbringing and Georgina's? Betsy was allowed to take Johnny to church, Georgina sometimes accompanying her, and sometimes David himself. Why did he not ask her why he at Johnny's age had not been taken? Why did he not tell her of the distress that must have been caused in the early days (she was guessing!) not, as was usual with boys, by having to say his sensitive prayers in the face of derision, but by his not having any to say? Why did he not ask her the reason for all the things which marked his home lessons as having been different from those of other boys?

She believed sometimes that he knew.

She could only watch him, hoping that one day the strings of his tongue would be loosed.

He had outgrown the little theatre now, though its day had been a long one. Perhaps the toy (which was n't a toy) grew too elaborate in its later phases. The successive stages had grown deeper and deeper to admit of more ambitious effects. When a row of gas-burners took the place of the delightful tin footlights with the wicks and the smelly colza oil, perhaps its doom was already struck. He had turned to other things; begun to learn dancing. The plays were put away; the theatre itself (swathed, to be sure, in sheets of newspaper to keep the dust from it and preserve it) was relegated to a shelf in the box-room at the top of the house. It was done with, but it had served its purpose.

It had gone the way of old toys. When you are a man, or going to be a man, you put away childish things, that is all. But it was in good company in its retirement. On the same shelf stood the little holland-covered box of enduring memory.

She believed that he knew. She could not have told when first the conviction came to her. She searched his face sometimes for confirmation of her suspicions. He was growing very like now to what his father had been as a young man — the same steady outlook from level eyes; the same tall well-covered slenderness; the same easy carriage. His voice even had something of the same tone. But there all resemblances ceased.

It seemed to her so wonderful sometimes that this growing unknowable creature should once have been part of herself; or that what she had known so intimately should, under her eyes, have developed into this big young stranger. No, it was not under her eyes that the miracle had taken place. It was in the months of the years of the recurring separations that the changes were worked. Always

he came back to her a little bigger, a little older, a little more mature. Difficult to say whether the changes were the more apparent mentally or physically. Listening to him sometimes — he had opinions now, if you please, on politics, literature, art! — she thought the one. Looking at his body which athletics had developed, the other. Her heart swelled with pride when she saw him stripped for bathing. She remembered a term that her husband had applied to her children. Yes, David was truly as he had claimed for him, in the most sacred sense, a Love-Child. Happier women might have envied her here, and probably did so envy her. But there was a little despair even in this thought also.

But as the fear for the harmony between the brothers was dissipated, another began slowly to take its place. She began to see that there was no communion of thought between David and his father. In his father's presence David was silent. At first when she became aware of this she had been content to attribute it to shyness. David had never, she thought, been on such unrestricted terms of confidence with his father as those which had always marked his relations with herself. Were any boys quite free from some feeling of awe of their fathers? But presently, though she called to mind John's "Boys are odd creatures, remember — shy with their parents to a degree that's unbelievable," she saw, or thought she saw, that awe, in the sense in which she had applied the word to the case, had no part in David's feelings. David's was not the shyness, then, that is based on any sort of fear, or indeed on any self-distrust. John's words took a fresh significance. They shewed her suddenly that he was conscious of the reserve in the attitude of his son. Poor John. Were they even in some sort an admission of failure? She would not let herself think this. But she continued, now, reluctantly to observe.

Georgina, who took life very smoothly indeed, as her long-

suffering governess could have told you, and altogether was contented with things as they were, joked frankly with her father. No 'shyness' there, no suggestion of restraint. She respected his authority, but, out of hours, as it were, could meet him on bantering terms, taking and thrusting, wholly at her very comfortable ease. Atmospheres troubled not the Georgina, who had babbled on, as we may remember, upon the dreadful morning of the departure from Brussels. A frown did not abash her.

Nor was Johnny tongue-tied in the presence of John. He knew his own importance too well for that. He, for all the world to see, was the apple of his father's eye.

Only David was silent with him. Or perhaps it was not so much that he was silent, as that he did not address him if there was any one else whom he could address. And perhaps even that was to overstate the case. For the two did talk, of course, — often, as she reminded herself, at great length. But . . . no, it was not her imagination . . . there was between them an acting and reacting constraint. Was it, as she suspected, that David knew? She was afraid now to bring things to a head by seeming to perceive. Might she not confirm what as yet she only feared? Not that she did not hope that David did indeed know; her dread was that knowledge should have implied judgment.

"David," — so far she ventured one day when he had asked her to go for a walk with him, — "why don't you sometimes get your father to go with you?"

"Don't you want to come, Mother?"

His mother laughed.

"I think I always want to go with you, — and — that's perhaps why."

"Oh, Father would say if he wanted to come too."

"I meant alone with you."

"Instead of you?"

She nodded.

"But why?"

She had just told him.

"I think he might like to be asked."

"Oh, well, you come this time," David said that time, and the matter dropped.

She watched to see whether her suggestion would be carried out later. She thought that David, who never as a rule was undecided about anything that he meant or wanted to do, did linger the next day on the flagged paths of the garden, where his father was sitting after luncheon, but whether he spoke or not she did not know, and she did know that that afternoon David went out alone.

Was it knowledge and judgment, and if judgment, what would follow?

Why, why had she not told him? She had known in her heart that it was she or his father who ought to have told him, and that the telling ought to have taken place while his mind was still very young. She knew now that she had deceived herself, and it *was* against her better judgment that she had been silent. And so it was open rupture that she feared — not between David and herself; come what might she was sure of David; but between David and his father. How could David be expected to understand? If the iron had entered into his soul the sense of injury would be ineradicable, the wound also too deep for healing. And the shock, though it could not have been averted, might have been mitigated. The sting, for her, lay there.

And as time went on and nothing happened, her fears would be lulled and something like happiness would enfold her. So much that she could never have hoped for had come to her. Her home — that she should have a home! — was an abiding solace to her. What shelter the panelled walls of her own little sitting-room afforded her. In the days of the wandering she had not been able to do much work, nor cared greatly for the sewings and stitchings that engross most women, but here her needle was her constant agreeable companion. She made and she em-

broidered and she mended. She took pride in her linen cupboard, and marked or re-marked every sheet and tablecloth, napkin and towel, with cunning embroideries. For pleasant hours the sound of her thread passing rhythmically through hemp or flax would be for her the gentle sound, as it were, of the passing of time itself.

"You don't leave me enough to do, m'lady," Betsy would complain. "All this ought by rights to be done in the nursery, which should stand for the workroom in this house. There's Ellen eating her head off. I'm sure I'm often put to it to find something to give her to do."

David's mother smiled to herself.

"Look, Betsy," — she held up an embroidered initial for Betsy's inspection. "Would a young thing like Ellen do them quite like this, do you think?" She was really proud of her handiwork. Not a stitch was ill-placed or ill-executed.

"Most probably and not," was the exact form of Betsy's admission.

"Then don't grudge me my occupation," said David's mother.

Her work was to her what other women's social duties and amusements were to them. What greater pleasure than the sense of housewifery that these domestic activities afforded her? They represented to her all that had for so long been denied to her. The mothers of Israel, after the forty years of tents in the wilderness, may have felt something akin to what she felt when, at length, they knew what it was to have roofs once more over their heads, and houses to set and keep in order. She enjoyed all that had to do with her housekeeping: her shoppings; her modest still-room; the stocking and the disposition of her storeroom. It was one of Georgina's and Johnny's most treasured pleasures, as, in its time, it had been one of David's and Georgina's, to be present when she gave out the groceries for the week. Servants had their allowances then: so much tea, so much sugar. The sweet-smelling store-

room behind the pantry — what was there that it did not contain, from coffee to candles; tapioca to treacle or even tin tacks; soap, starch, soda, to spices and semolina and sago and string; jams to juniper berries; figs to flavourings? — was a grocer's shop in little.

The years of lodgings and hotels had not unfitted her for housekeeping. She fell into it as readily and as easily as if all her life had been spent in managing a house, and the time abroad but a brief interruption in a long and familiar routine. She knew instinctively what to order and how much; knew approximately what things ought to cost; how to choose and how to control her servants. Everything that went smoothly spoke to her personal care and her good generalship. She took pride, as she took pleasure, in the ordering of her house. There was thus a refuge for her in all the businesses of the busy day. Without these, as she grew older, her life would have been unprotected indeed. They stood to her, that is, as, in its time and its turn, the little theatre to David, for solace and for sanctuary.

CHAPTER IX

NEITHER had David given her the confidence which was on his lips on the night when she had gone to his room and wakened him out of sleep. He might have spoken then, as she, in turn, could have spoken. What he was to be was still undivulged. He was to go to Oxford; so much was assumed to be settled. But for him, as for her, though for very different reasons, Oxford meant but a marking of time.

When he turned his mind, in after years, to this period he could be surprised at his own tenacity. He never wavered in his purpose — never, as the old man in the dingy shop had prophesied, looked back. His school-days themselves were shadowy in comparison. Individual boys at whose arrival he had been excited, and with whom he made friends or did not achieve friendship, or who upon acquaintance were disappointing, stood out for him in recollection. Individual days: summer evenings when the softness of the air, or the way the light lingered on the trees and the slopes, almost hurt him for sheer beauty: wistful autumn afternoons, brown and shining: cold misty winter evenings: ardent days of spring — these too stood out. Boys he had hated — often for some physical reason, some want of proportion or some defect or even trick which offended him — he could remember too. And days, but not so very many, which had seemed to be cursed. But, for the rest, the second ten years of his life, which embraced the whole of his school-days, did not make so deep an impression upon him as the first, and they passed for him like a dream. A dream, however, which held a dream, and it was this inner dream which was real.

The little theatre had been but a young outlet for young feelings. The feelings grew with the power to feel. The need to express became correspondingly urgent. And so,

while external things slipped by without leaving much mark upon him, so that he was never to have any vivid recollection of his schooling, his dream was ever before him. He told no one — not the best-beloved of his friends; not one of the successive Davids to his own Jonathan, or Jonathans, as the case might be, to his own David. Yet all his friendships, particularly the less happy ones, were involved — as everything else that caused him any sort of emotion. His emotions, in other words, were what counted with him. Something, oddly, was accomplished when he had put the friend who hurt him, or who had the power to hurt him, out of his heart. He could not have explained this, nor did he try to explain it even to himself. He had to accept it, as each one of us, at some time or other, has to accept his own temperament with all its qualities and limitations. So where his dream was concerned, if his mother was not vouchsafed his confidence, neither was any one else. He would have told her if he could have told anyone. Why then did he not tell her? It was not wholly that he anticipated opposition — though that he did expect it he had shewn, when, on that midnight impulse which she had not attempted to encourage, he had begun the avowal which he could not finish. He could detach himself sufficiently to be able to hear, as it would strike other ears, the phrase which he would probably have employed, and perhaps he had enough sense of humour to perceive the absurd sound which it would have for them. He was wholly untried as yet. He must have something to shew, something to his credit, before he could proclaim his ambition. For it was an ambition, not a mere fancy. The phrase, which he could not bring himself to speak, held, in suggestion, all that could be used in argument against — against the putting of what it expressed into practice! Vaingloryings, struttings, boastings, swaggerings, with every sort of self-conceit, these with a dozen other meretricious things were conveyed, he knew, in the sound of the four words. There could be but opposition in

the face of what made thus for prejudice. But these were not what the words meant to him. And how to show what they did mean till the opportunity of proving what he could do should present itself? So he waited, chafing often, filled sometimes with divine despairs, but — the despairs, indeed, as he dimly guessed, part of his equipment! — never wholly discouraged. What that was worth doing had ever been done easily? The kingdom which he desired would have to be conquered. There were citadels for him to storm.

Luck was against him for a long time. Theatricals always ended the winter term. There were excitements in the air about midway through November, and then it would become known that a play had been chosen and was being cast. The lot would fall upon this one and that of the boys, who would be sent for by the committee of management, which was composed of one or two of the younger masters and a group of the monitors and older boys. The bigger parts were divided, not always too suitably, amongst this committee; for the others there was the rest of the school to recruit from.

Amongst two hundred boys, there was, it is safe to say, plenty of talent which for one reason or another was overlooked. David used to hold his breath, as it were, till every part was filled. Here was Chessington Minor who spoke as if potatoes were in his mouth, and who got a part two years running; here was Litterson who could n't say his *s*'s or *c*'s and called himself 'Litterthon,' but who was cast one year for Cassius in *Julius Cæsar*, which he called 'Cathiuth in *Juliuth Thæthar*'; here was a part even for Smith, who thought all acting rot, and who only took it because, if you were in the theatricals, you got off some of your lessons on the ground of the rehearsals which you had to attend. There were many others who could act and who did, — some of them admirably, — but there were more (amongst whom he most passionately included himself), who, if it could only somehow be known, could act

too and even perhaps act better. There was a boy called Cliptop, a born comedian (he made his name afterwards and a fortune into the bargain!), who never once got a look-in. David never was bitter. His disappointment sometimes was.

Four years passed before he got his first part. For four years, once in each, he endured the suspenses, yes, and the hopes too (they had to be 'endured' like the fears!) which came regularly for him when the preliminaries were being arranged; and for four years ate his heart out while the happier chosen, having been admitted to the mysteries of the rehearsals, were presently actually rehearsing. Thrice happy chosen! For four years, then, the disappointments having been got over as they always were and the Night arrived, he kicked his excited heels, and clapped his excited hands, from the happy back benches where the boys sat behind the rest of the audience in the transformed Great Hall.

Then, in his fifth year, he got a part. Even then he did not get it because it was supposed that he had any special aptitude for acting. Why, then? Because the play was Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, and it was known, by no means to his credit, that he could speak French.

"It's the tailor's part. You're supposed to be a tailor, you know, and you have to bring M. Jourdain" (the stage-manager who spoke said 'Jourdon'), "his clothes. Do you think you could do that?"

David thought so.

"It's not a big part. I should think you'd be able to manage it all right."

It was certainly not a big part, as the pencillings in the script shewed him, but it was a part at last.

"Well, here it is. You'd better read it through with me just to get the hang of it. I'm M. Jourdon. Are you a quick study?"

David thought fairly quick.

"Well, I'll run through it with you presently. I'd meant the part for young Jackson — I don't much believe in

making experiments — but Jackson's accent's so bad, you see."

David, who knew Jackson, 'saw' right enough. The surprising thing, as perhaps he saw also, was that M. 'Jourdon' should see.

He had to be content with this, anyway, and to have passed the mystic portals at all was so wonderful that the reason for his admission hardly mattered. Now he would not be shut out of the Great Hall when the stage was being erected! Now his eyes would no longer vainly follow the lucky company of the players as they went off to rehearsal. Boyish thoughts? Very real ones even in the supreme moment of his joy that a chance should have come to him at last. The feeling of being outside had not been one of the least difficult to bear calmly in the years of his young waiting. What wonder that such trifling aspects of his good fortune should present themselves to his excitement? The chance which had come to him might be small, but it brought all the coveted privileges in its train. He had suffered too much outside shut doors not to exult in their mere opening.

He took the script and retired with it to the back of the room, while Tarpalin, the stage-manager, — 'Jourdon Tarpalin' as David called him now in his own mind, — interviewed another boy who had been sent for about another part. The other boy, one Crawton Minimus, in the lower school, did not get it, because of *his* accent, though this in David's opinion was quite as good (as well it might be!) as that of most of his judges.

"It is n't Bourgewaw," David heard Tarpalin say; "it's Bourgewah — W A H — wah; like *a* in *far*."

That was the beginning. We are not to suppose that he did great things, that he brought down the house, or played the others off the stage. He did none of these things. He was more nervous on the Night than he would have supposed possible. He could eat nothing to speak of at

dinner or tea, and carried his script about with him all day. His fear was that he would forget his words. He wanted to arrange a code of signals of distress beforehand with the prompter.

"Goodness," said Tarpalin, sweating, himself, with nervousness, "if you're going to be like that . . ."

"I'm not," said David. "Only in case, I meant."

"I knew we were wrong to try experiments," said Tarpalin.

And then Tarpalin wanted reassuring, himself. It was his wig that felt so tight, and he would never be able to stoop in these breeches either. He believed they must have sent the wrong ones from Abraham's. And had n't the man given him too many lines? Sure? "Well, don't you give me wrong cues, young Penstephen, or it'll jolly well be the worse for you. Do you know your words or don't you?"

"Of course I do," said David.

"Then what do you want to talk about the prompter for? You ought n't to think that there was such a person. Good Lord, if you dry up or if you make any one else . . ."

And behind the nervousness, and through it, and even in it, David was conscious of an intoxicating feeling of excitement. He might be frightened, but he would not have changed his fear for any other emotion. The rehearsals had gone but too quickly. He had lived from one to the next, counting the hours, almost, between them. It was so enthralling to watch and to see how the play shaped. Whether it was a good play or not he had not the remotest idea: it was a play; that was enough for him. From the chaos of the stumbling first reading — Heavens, the stumbling, and Heavens, the French! — to the comparative order of the dress rehearsal, what an absorbing process and progression! Not that there seemed to be much progress sometimes. There were days when all movement seemed to be retrograde — when the proverbial miracu-

lous Allrightness of the Night seemed to be the only possible hope for the play. It was as interesting to watch as to act — or almost as interesting, or — no, you were panting to play all the parts yourself . . . playing them, too, inside you, and, as you waited for your own cue, often playing them quite differently. That was why a rehearsal in which you took no active part was so oddly tiring. You could often do the parts which you did n't have to do, so much better than your own which you had!

During this time life had been more vivid, more keenly lived, than ever before. He was n't mistaken in what he wanted. This *was*, as David saw it, life. All the other interests and pleasures and excitements seemed pale and misty in comparison. Some of the boys did not work at their parts. They would glance at them at the last moment and trust to luck. They would mislay their books. (David's was, ridiculously, under his pillow when he slept.) They would make the same mistakes every time; forget their positions; miss their cues; be fooling when they should have been at attention; be absent even, keep the stage waiting.

"Where's Collingham? Where's that young idiot, Collingham! Collingham! Collingham!"

The name would go resounding through the Hall; through the passage outside, where hats and coats hung, and where the notice board was on which were posted daily the school orders or directions or announcements (the hours of the rehearsals amongst them); and then through the cloisters below, where the grub-shop kept by the porter was, from which perhaps a protesting, spluttering Collingham would hurriedly and shamefacedly issue, his mouth full of biscuit or cake.

To care, nay, to be able, to think of anything else!

Or, mistaking buffoonery for comedy, a boy would want to play the fool on the stage itself; or would be stupid; or be mule-obstinate.

And yet, out of all this, some sort of order. Act I would

go vilely, and then Act I would go well. Act II would go well, and then it would be Act I that seemed flat and stale and unprofitable. And then, lo, two acts would go fairly smoothly. Fascinating, all of it.

And other satisfactions. To his surprise he began to see that Jourdon Tarpalin's manner toward him was changing. The patronising tone had been dropped at an early rehearsal, and that, since he was quick to see that the older boy was not prodigal of praise, was perhaps as much in the way of approval as David had allowed himself to expect; but by degrees he became conscious of something more. Tarpalin, in small ways, let David see that he was well disposed toward him. This, David with quite unassumed modesty put down at first to his merely not being troublesome. Tarpalin, equable enough generally, could pitch into the boys who gave him trouble, and, if he was really angry, let his tongue fly to some purpose. As he, David, was keenly interested on his own account in all that went on, he was naturally on the spot when he was wanted. But presently David saw that it was for no negative qualities that he had grown in his manager's estimation, but that, unlikely as it seemed, Tarpalin believed in him. He never told David that his performance was good. He just watched it, not, after the first, interrupting it constantly as he did most of the others, but keeping a silence that David knew somehow was not condemnatory. He would put another boy to stand for Jourdain, and would go down into the body of the hall. Sometimes he whispered to one of the others of the principals.

His severest comment to David was that sometimes he could n't hear him.

"Speak up — no, not you. Penstephen, I mean. The last boy on the last bench has got to hear you, remember."

Then David would speak a little louder.

Some of the others he never let alone for a moment.

"No, no, no. Yes, you, Collingham. Not a bit like it. Good Lord, you get worse every time. Take your entrance

again, and, for goodness' sake, man, try to remember that you're a girl. Not a blooming little shrimp trying to play a coal-heaver. And where ought you to be now? Below the table, you ass, below, not above it! Which is above and which is below? Do you know? And which is your right hand and which is your left? Then behave as if you did. Now, have you marked it? Well, mark it. Good Lord, how many times have I got to tell you! For goodness' sake, some one see that he does mark it. Now, are we ready! Then once more."

And then it would be another of the young actors or another who would come in for his displeasure.

"Johnson. Stop. Stop, I say. Do you hear me! Cross on that line. Yes, you've always crossed on that. Not so far. There. Stand still. Now, speak."

Johnson would cross, fidget with his hands and his feet, and be struck with dumbness.

"Give him the line."

And perhaps the prompter would have lost his place, and would give the wrong line. And then it would be the prompter's turn.

Tarpalin was very just. He did not turn upon you without cause. So that not to be pitched into, and above all not to be pulled up too often, meant that you were giving satisfaction.

Presently, though David was so much younger than he, Tarpalin would talk to him as to one of the bigger boys.

"Have you done much acting?"

David practically had done none.

Tarpalin looked surprised.

"Then how do you know what to do?"

"Oh, I suppose one tries to think what one would do if one really were the person one's supposed to be. The words are a guide, are n't they?"

"I sometimes wonder," said Tarpalin, "when I listen to some of these chaps!"

Another day he wanted to know how David knew as much as he did of — well, the ropes.

"How, ropes?" David asked.

"Oh, the positions of things. The points of the compass — If I tell you to go up stage, you don't immediately come down."

That was the work of the little theatre. He remembered the ingenuous direction, on the back of the fly-leaf of every play-book, which told you that *R* meant Right and *L* Left, and that the Stage was supposed to face the Audience. It had all begun there.

"Oh, I 've always been interested," he said. He could n't have spoken of the little theatre. "You pick up things when you are."

And then one day Tarpalin stopped calling Jourdain 'Jourdon,' and David, though Tarpalin said nothing, and though, in a cast the members of which spoke with various accents, there were of course plenty of others beside himself who said 'Jourdain,' knew instinctively that it was to him and not to these others that a rather subtle and most unexpected compliment had been paid. That made him extraordinarily happy.

And so, with excitements on the way, things moved toward the Night. There was the excitement of the day when the Great Hall was filled with hammerings, and the stage was being erected. David watched spell-bound. It had no such proscenium as that of his own miniature stage. No grouped Neptune and Tritons, blowing shells for horns, surmounted the opening. There were just a couple of painted Corinthian columns, some stencilled scroll-work of an Adamsy pattern, a bunch of musical instruments festooned about with floating ribands, and, at each of the upper corners, a mask — Tragedy with strained eye-sockets and drooping lips (yet the whole mouth somehow four-square) on the one side, and Comedy, with the same four-square mouth, yet twisted in laughter, on the other. Very simple, but oddly satisfying. All there was need for seemed to be there in visible emblem or inspiring sugges-

tion. The curtain was a sort of Fragonard picture, such as he had often seen in the galleries that he had been taken to abroad when he was a little boy. He liked the hooped ladies and the satin-coated periwigged gallants. They too were inspiring. It was delightful somehow, when the curtain was at last in its place, to see it roll up and down in its frame. He must needs examine the pulleys, and master them, as though it were he and not the exercised prompter who would have the working of them. Even the hammering-in of the nails in the boards of the platform itself, with its gentle rake, had fascinated him. How surely and swiftly each nail, taken by the carpenters from a mouthful of nails, went home under the deafening hammerings! His, we may be sure, was the first foot to tread the boards when the rough joists were covered. And the footlights — gas, like those of his own elaborate model! No electric light then; gas still the last word in lighting. What a hot glowing row! You could feel the warmth of them on your face when they were turned up. That, too, with the sort of gulf or river of light which they made, to divide you from the audience — that, too, was inspiring.

There had been the day of the measuring when, for the guidance of the *costumiers*, your height, and the length of your limbs, and your waist- and chest- and head-measurements, had been taken and set down against the name of the character you were to play. David had proved to be nearly an inch taller than he had thought. Perhaps that was caused by excitement. And then after an interval had come the day when the dress-baskets arrived — neat square wicker trunks with 'Abraham's' painted across them, and an address in Covent Garden. David promised himself to see the outside of Abraham's shop, when the holidays came and he should be back in London. The boxes stood in one of the two classrooms which had been vacated and partly dismantled for dressing-rooms. Then had come the unpacking and the distributing. None of the garments, the accurate measuring notwithstanding, quite

fitted at first. On one boy, clothes would hang like rags on a scarecrow; on another, sleeves would leave inches of wrist bare, or breeches be filled to bursting. But a wardrobe woman had come down with the baskets, and under her skilful tackings and pinnings and lettings-out — these last, however, more reluctant than any takings-in — miracles happened.

"Not fit? Go on, my dear. I've seen that coat on a chest like a cheese, and fit that, and the very next week on a little manikin of a fella with no more breast to him than a barn-door, and fit 'im too. You don't rightly know what a coat's capable of, not till you get a needle in your 'and and a mouthful of safety-pins. Things should start large, that's all I say."

Oddly garbed figures buzzed round her.

"Yes, one at a time. I'll take you next, or you. I'm not particular. Settle it amongst you, young gentlemen. There, that's better. Too tight, sir! Not it. You can breathe right enough if you choose to, and if y' can't, why, il fo soofray, as they say, pour ate belle. Well, I'll give you another eighth of a hinch. That do?" She would take a dozen rapid stitches and then bite her thread. "Now the sleeves. Too long? Well, nothing to speak of, and stand still, dear, for goodness gracious sake, or you'll 'ave my needle in y'r arm, and then you'll holler, *I* know! I'll shorten the ruffle. I'm not going to touch the velvet for you, sir, nor nobody else."

She too was part of it. The magic was in her, too. Her name was Vokins. Miss Vokins! The magic of that! London was written all over her, and that particular bit of London (just north of the Strand) which clustered round the older theatres. She was plump and shabby, had a pleasant, pert, good-tempered face, rather battered by time, and a little — not to any disfiguring extent — pitted by smallpox. It was her hair which seemed to point her connection, direct or indirect, with the concerns of the theatre. This — she had heaps of it — was towzled rather

than 'done,' and was of a dingy reddish colour darkening to a very decided brown near the roots. She had very shrewd eyes with a twinkle in them and — yes, it was that partly — a look of Nell Gwynne.

All the time that she worked she kept up a running flow of rather hoarse talk of which the foregoing is but a sample. She called them all 'dear,' from Tarpalin himself to the smallest super.

"Stop for the show? Not me. I've got to be in Canterbury this time to-morrow. '*Amlet* they're doin' there. Some of them amachoors 'ave n't 'alf got a cheek. I only come down just to get this to rights, and off I go again. Worse than bein' on the road I call it. Now let's look at you, dear. No wonder it's uncomfortable. If 'e 'as n't got it back to front! Very plain you was n't meant to wear petticoats. Oh, don't worry me about y' wigs. They're not my business. Kressler's man, 'e'll see about them when 'e comes to make y' up."

At last it was David's turn. It was almost a disappointment to him that his dress needed so little alteration.

"Might 'a' been made for y'. We'll just draw y' in, sir, a little bit more at the waist. Like that, see. There, a Picture I call you. Now, into the next room, all of you, and off with 'em, and careful, mind, like good gentlemen, not to burst the tackings, or move the pins, and I'll 'ave 'em all ready for y' in an hour."

David hoped he should see her again. He seemed, as never before, to have been in touch with the real thing. But she did her work incredibly quickly, and by the time they reassembled for the dress rehearsal she was gone.

"Yes, a funny old thing," Tarpalin said. "She comes every year. Good old sort, is n't she?"

David would n't have called her old. As he saw her she was even comely. He had seen her arrive in her tight yellow ulster with the amazing lines and the big horn buttons, which, in conjunction with the tilted beaver hat, made her look like the principal boy in a pantomime. Dressed so,

and with the addition of a cane under her arm, she would have looked ready to sing *Ladida* or *Tiddy-fol-lol*, or whatever just then was the song of the moment. Even when she had peeled off the ulster, and stood displayed in her under shabbiness of bursting black satin, her ample bosom stuck over with pins and threaded and unthreaded needles, she did not lose a certain raffish charm. Nothing so alive as Miss Vokins could ever have seemed old to David.

She ought to have been an actress herself David was thinking, and spoke his thought.

"So she has," said Tarpalin — "at least a pro, of sorts. She was in the chorus of *Madame Angot* and a lot of other things. She 's understudied too —Serpolette in *Les Cloches de Corneville* on tour, and something in *La Mascotte*. She told me that last year. She'll talk your head off if you'll let her."

David opened his eyes wide. It wanted but that she should have been born in Wych Street or Holiwell Street or Drury Lane. These names had 'sounds' for him, as the Hoxton Street, formerly Hoxton, Old Town, and the Swan Street, Minories, and the Old Street, St. Luke's, of the little theatre. Perhaps she even had been!

"Then why —?" he began.

"Oh, lost her voice," said Tarpalin — "after an illness she *says*. But if you ask me, Anno Domini."

She was a figure of tragedy then. He, at least, would never think of her as old.

And then, Kressler's man arrived with his make-up boxes, his paints and his powders, his bistres and antimonies, his *crayons noirs* and lining pencils, his plaited ropes of crêpe hair, his spirit gums, his powder puffs and hare's feet; and a whole new world of wonder and enchantment was opened up before David's eyes. With the aid of these things you could be changed, as if by necromancy, into almost any other conceivable or inconceivable type of person. The whole cast of your features, or at all events of their expression, could be altered, with almost, if not quite,

the very shape of some of them. David had known this, of course, but it was none the less wonderful to see it in practice. As the clothes, under the adroit fingers of Miss Vokins, were made to fit bodies, so faces, under the hands of Kressler's man, were made to fit parts. Collingham, quite an ugly boy with a rather pasty face and pale eyelashes, became a vision of feminine loveliness. Tarpalin put on thirty years or so, and became quite unrecognisable, as he turned veritably into the redoubtable Bourgeois Gentilhomme.

David, with the others waiting their turns, watched, fascinated. Eyelids would tremble and eyes water, perhaps, as the fine black or blue lines were applied to unaccustomed rims. How heavy the lines were sometimes which, presently, in the glare of the footlights, were to show themselves as no more than looked just (artificially) natural. How eyes shone which before perhaps had been lack-lustre!

Some of the more experienced of the players gave directions. Tarpalin had been amongst these. He had his own views of what M. Jourdain should look like.

"Not so much rouge, man," David had heard him protest. "I don't want to look like Punch or an Aunt Sally."

The rouge had been toned down with powder. He came back while the next boy was in Kressler's hands to complain that it wanted toning down still more. Kressler's man, with no time as he said to argue, applied some more powder and turned back to the boy in the chair.

"Let 'em 'ave it their own way, I say," he murmured when Tarpalin was gone. "But don't let 'im blame me if kind friends in front tell 'im 'e's too pale. Nothing like footlights for takin' the colour out of you."

Presently it was David's turn and he took the chair. He felt as he leaned his head back, a towel round his neck, as if he were at the barber's, or perhaps the dentist's.

"Let's see, sir, you're — oh, ah, yes. The Tailor, of course. Have you any views of *your* own, sir, before I begin?"

David should think so, indeed, but had hardly expected

to be asked. As he was, however, he gave them sturdily.

"That is n't just how we generally make up the part."

"It 's the way I see it," David said; and added, "if you don't mind."

Rather to his surprise — or perhaps it was only that the man from Kressler's had not, as he had said, time to argue? — he found his views were not combatted.

But it was n't indifference. Tarpalin had taken him the wrong way, perhaps.

The man, taciturn hitherto, began to talk.

"I like y' t' 'ave views, y' know. Shows an intelligent interest. Within reason, that is. There's some amatures worries y' life out. Gets their 'eads swelled quicker, I 've noticed, than any mere pro. Some of 'em thinks they know better than anybody else." (Rub, rub, rub, meanwhile; it was as if David was being lathered for shaving.) "Some of these 'ere society ladies! Want to look pretty when they 're playing character. 'Ow, not any wrinkles!' (Mrs. Malaprop, if you please!) Or, 'I could n't look like that! It does n't look a bit nice.' (Mrs. Hardcastle, maybe, — Tony Lumpkin's mother — *you* know, in *She Stoops*. Or, 'Gracious, you've made me look fifty!' (Mrs. Candour, I trouble you, in *The School for Scandal!*) They all want to be ongenues. I 'ave n't common patience! But we know at once what we've to deal with, and if Lady Macbeth wants to look like Juliet, well, let 'er, I say. But reasonable views, that 's different. Now, sir, look up. Quite still, please."

David did n't need to be told. He could keep quite still. What mattered a little tickling? His eyes did not water.

"And of course, be rights, as I don't forget in me own mind, *we* don't exist. Not prop'ly we don't. Who ever 'eard of a pro letting any one make him up but 'imself? That 's why I listen when there is views and reason. For why again? Because owner of said views ought, in point of fact, mind, to be talking to 'imself."

"Could my eyebrows be made a little higher?" David suggested.

"I see. Wait a minute. We'll have these out. More arched like? There," — after a pause during which he worked busily, — "that more what you mean?"

"That's got it."

Curious the difference it made. Curious, too, in the light of his inexperience, that the difference should have been exactly what he had hoped. His face was changing every moment.

Kressler's man read his thoughts.

"Ah, your own mother would n't know y', sir, time I've done with y'."

He worked on for some minutes, David watching him in the looking-glass. But his words had sent David's thoughts flying homewards. He wished that his mother were coming like other boys' mothers to see him. Neither of his parents had ever been down yet for any ceremonies connected with the school. In his present frame of mind, to the contentment of which everything lately had contributed, he believed he was not going to be bad in his small part. And if he was n't bad, if he made any sort of little success in it, it would help toward the ultimate telling. But no. This was but the thin end of the wedge. He would get better parts than this. Time enough. His mother should see him when there was something to see. All the same he would have liked her to be there to see him even when there was n't.

Kressler's man, the lines all in, the colour applied, gave his face its final light dusting of powder.

"Now, y' wig, sir." He had tried it before, but taken it off to have freer scope for his ground work. "Sent y' a good one, I was glad to see. Fits, too, as if it'd been made for y'. Wants just a little dressin', though. And I'll do that before to-morrow night. There you are, sir, and 'ow do you like y'self?"

"Jolly good, Sir Thingamy P.," said the next boy. "Jolly good. You just do me as well as that, Mr. Kressler."

"Ah, there 's faces and faces," said the man from Kressler's darkly.

David, looking at himself in the long glass in the dressing-room next door, was quite sure that he did wish that his mother could see him. She would most certainly not have recognised him.

And so to the delicious terrors and delights of the Night, when he made his first appearance on any stage, and, if his performance was not such as to set the Thames on fire, of his yet quite palpable and quite significant success. Outwardly nothing particular happened — the part was not showy, and the honours naturally went to the bigger rôles.

When all was over, and he stood devouring sandwiches and drinking claret-cup with the rest in the crowded uproarious dressing-room, he knew that a beginning had been made, indeed, and that the gates of his terrestrial paradise were open to him thenceforward.

Tarpalin, flushed with his own success, clapped him on the back, nearly making him choke: "By Jove, young Penstephen, next year we'll show them."

There it was in words.

"I shall get other parts?"

"I should jolly well think so."

There were groups still hanging about the entrance when at last David came out. Still under the spell of the acting, he likened them to those that hung, as he had read, about the stage-doors of theatres to see actors emerge in mufti. He saw all the world as a stage that night.

"There's Tarpalin," he heard some one say, — "who played the old chap." And then he heard his own name.

A figure detached itself from the others and made for him, David.

It was the little old man of the shop in the back street.

"Hullo," David said, smiling.

"I was there," said the old man.

"Were you?" said David.

"You'd never guess where. In the organ loft. Ah, I thought that'd surprise you. Your head porter's brother 's a friend of mine, that's how. I wanted to come. Well!"

David waited.

"You've plenty to learn, sir, I won't say that you have n't. You want more breadth and leisure; you want to hold things like, and not hurry your words. You want practice and experience. But, God forgive me, if it 's this I've been fostering with my penny plains and tuppence coloureds, you won't stop, I venture to predict, what you've begun to-night."

"What?" said David, not quite following.

The old man shook his head ominously.

"What do you mean?" said David. "Out with it."

"Ah, it'll out right enough. That 's the trouble. The trouble for your anxious relations, I mean. Was any of them here?"

"No."

"That 's a pity, and yet again I don't know."

"What do you mean?" said David.

"Why, only that you've got something that perhaps they won't like you to have. It was a fairly good show all round. I've seen many worse — here, yes, and in theatres too. I've been a theatre-goer all my life."

"But what have I got?" said David. His eyes were shining. He had not quite got all his make-up off, and there was still a shadow round his lids that made his eyes even consciously burn.

"I don't think I've ever been mistaken yet," the old man said, looking at him. "Well, sir, my congratulations for what they may be worth."

But he would not tell him quite what he meant.

"Something," he said, "that not one of the others had — though some of 'em, mind you, were better than you — something that not one in twenty has — no, nor fifty for that matter."

"I have n't the least idea what you mean," David said; but he felt suddenly as if he had passed an examination.

CHAPTER X

It was in the year that followed, not these theatricals, but the next (in which, a year older and more than a year bigger, David had the happiness of playing Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*), that his mother was torturing herself with the second of her fears. She had been watching him long before that for signs and indications of that knowledge that might be supposed to be his, and even, as we have seen, half persuading herself that she had found them. But she was wrong. Surrounded though he was by people who might know, and unlikely as it thus seemed that he could escape knowledge, he had yet so far escaped it. One or other of the masters would sometimes look at him with the interest which his peculiar case must necessarily have excited in the minds of any who were aware of it. They, like his mother, may have wondered whether he knew. More probably they would have supposed that he did. But it was not in any case for them to enlighten him. His intimates at school may not have known. It appears probable that they did not. Tact is not a conspicuous attribute of the school-boy. He knew, of course, that there was 'something,' and that this, whatever it was, was connected in some way with his father. There had been talk in the early days. But talk dies down sometimes as easily as it arises. The good-looking boy, whose questions had started it, had left, it chanced, in David's third term. David could never look back without aversion to the incident in which he was concerned, and the uncomfortable feeling it had left behind it; but no more had come of it than that it had entailed for him a sort of false start — the 'way' lost to him in consequence of which he had long since made up — and by degrees there had come to be whole periods when he could put it out of his mind. The circumstances, it can only be

supposed, had not arisen which must inevitably have led to his enlightenment. Up to his sixteenth, and then his seventeenth, and then even his eighteenth year, he was still uninformed. It seemed possible that he would attain to manhood in ignorance of his true position.

Thus it was that, though the constraint which his mother feared between David and his father did indeed exist, its presence was not attributable to the causes which she so apprehensively assigned to it. It arose actually out of David's father's manner toward David.

The knowledge of the injury, all unwitting, or, at least, unintentioned, as it may have been, that he had done to his firstborn, could never, we may be sure, have been quite absent from John Penstephen's consciousness. Reason as he would, it must have been there at the back of his mind, and insensibly, as was inevitable, its presence expressed itself in an uneasiness — a dis-ease rather — of the spirit which acted unconsciously upon his manner, and reacted thus upon David. Mary's quite different uneasiness, the existence of which David did not suspect any more than he suspected that of his father, had no such effect upon him. But nothing could ever have come between David and his mother.

He knew quite well that he did not talk to his father. It did not need her words to point this out to him. But he did not know that the fault was not wholly his own. He thought, indeed, that it was. He ought, he believed, to be able to be upon the same terms with his father as other boys with theirs. But somehow he could not. A walk with him was as embarrassing an ordeal to David, now, as the memorable walk at Homburg, and left him, moreover, not, as that walk had done, with a feeling that a closer communionship had been established between them, but with a sense of the impossibility that any such communionship should be lasting or in any degree real. It was a relief to him, and not a grief (or even a grievance), that his father so obviously found the company of his little brother

more congenial. There, indeed, was their one point of contact.

Yet even here their contact was not quite easy, for David's father, knowing what he knew, must assuredly have felt some sort of compunction when he saw David's affection for the child who one day must be the very token of the wrong that had been done him. Mary, in the depths of her heart, had a conviction which she would not acknowledge even to herself. Was John happier when David was at school? Was that even why David had been sent to school at all? In the boy's unusual circumstances the engaging of a private tutor for him would perhaps have been the advisable, maybe even the obvious, solution of the difficulties which had presented themselves when the question of his education had been considered. She had herself, in her anxiety for his well-being, wished that David should be educated at home. But David's father had overruled her. Public-school life was the making of a boy, knocked the corners off him, gave him grit and pluck and self-reliance — all the incontrovertible arguments, which, in the case of any other boy, she would herself have used. But in David's case . . . ? All the more in the case of David, he might have reminded her (but did not), who, she knew only too well, — or thought that she knew, — would need all the grit and the pluck and the self-reliance he could command. She had had no thought then that he had anything but David's welfare in mind — nor had she actually now. But, that she should have to combat such thoughts shewed, not only how sensitive she was to all that affected David, but also how far she and John had travelled on that road which they had unconsciously taken on the fateful day when he had made her his wife.

David, quite unjealous of Johnny, came, then, as he saw that there was some intangible constraint between himself and his father, even where they were so patently of one accord, to wonder whether it was possible that his father, where Johnny was concerned, could be jealous of him.

Surely not. Then why, here also, should there not be perfect ease between them?

So he tried to explain, and, as a thought is crystallised by being put into words, so the idea that there was anything to be explained, that there should even seem to be anything, gave to phantom nothings substance. The breach which Mary feared between her husband and her son was like to widen without, in a sense, — the sense, at least, in which she imagined it, — having any existence in fact. She saw it as an ominous frightening thing because she thought that she knew cause for it. The cause which she ascribed to it was not there. Yet a breach was daily becoming real.

But though Mary's fears, as we have seen, would be lulled from time to time, and she would let the sheltered feeling of the house in Cheyne Walk envelop her, so that sometimes she was almost able to forget, the consciousness of the sword that hung over her by its single thread never wholly left her. And though David did not know, he was becoming more and more aware of the strangeness of the conditions that ruled his life. Why this and why that, he would ask himself. Why, for example, so few visitors? Mary, for reasons that her son knew nothing of, had gone no more to Ettringham. Where David and Georgina could not go, their mother would not go. Nothing in the nature of an explanation had passed between the two ladies. Susan had very warmly renewed her invitation in the course of the year which followed the visit at which we assisted, but Mary made regrets and excuses. Then came a period during which Susan still affectionately invited her. Mary still made excuses. John urged her for a time. Mary had but one answer to anything that he might say: Susan knew why she could not go to Ettringham. Mary, however, urged him, in turn, to go, though she might not. She wished him to go. In the interests of Johnny he ought to go. There was every reason, she felt truly, why he should go and none why he should not. Betsy was sent meanwhile

with Johnny; and presently John took to going as before. Relations remained quite cordial between Susan and Mary. Letters, which were even genuinely affectionate, were written by one to the other, but neither put what each knew (and knew that the other knew) into words. The letters continued, but presently the invitations ceased. The last took the form of a standing one: Susan could well understand that, with a house to look after (Mary did not think it necessary to go very far afield for her excuses, or even to vary them!), dear Mary must find it difficult to leave home, but, whenever she felt inclined to come to Ettringham, she had only to write, and that she would be sure of a welcome she did not need to be told.

So the dinner-parties which were to have reinstated her had not taken place. People who would have been asked to call upon her were not asked to do so, and Mary, though she fully realised what she was doing, would not have had things otherwise.

Well, David had no wish for visitors. No young boy has. Visitors as visitors are to him but persons at whose approach — a bell heralding it — you make yourself scarce, and for whose departure — a bell, but a different one, heralding that also — you impatiently wait. Intruders, ousting you from rooms you look upon as your own; interruptions; bores with pretended claims upon the time of those whose whole attention should be yours! No, the young male has no use for visitors. But as David grew older, he saw that his parents led oddly isolated lives. He would wonder sometimes how they managed to fill their time. Not so much his mother, perhaps, who, attaching herself more and more to her home and its thousand and one occupations, was always busy. But his father. How did he content himself? Other men were in touch with their kind all day long; had their clubs; a dozen recreations. His father, except perhaps when he went away, saw few people outside his own circle. How had this curious state of things arisen? Why did it continue?

If he had ever asked his mother outright she would perhaps have told him. He had become too much accustomed to accepting life as it presented itself to him to ask? It was not quite that. He had come to know a look which came into his mother's eyes when questions were in his heart. It came into them — a sort of pleading apprehension — before his questions could frame themselves into words. There was, it seemed, even in his close intercourse with her, one reservation; one barred door; one tract of country which his feet might not tread, or were begged not, at least, to explore.

But though he did not wish for visitors, he did wish that he could have brought his own friends to the house freely. When he came across any of them in the holidays, he never felt quite unhindered in pressing upon them, or even proffering, the informal invitations which pass as a matter of course between schoolboys. He was never told in so many words not to do so, but, though he knew that all the instincts and inclinations of his parents were hospitable, he could not but see that he was not encouraged to ask his school-fellows to Cheyne Walk. Difficult indeed to account for this. The few people who did come to the house, former friends of his father's for the most part, and the one or two people who had called, were made welcome at all times. David thought his mother was never more delightful than on the occasions when any of the rare callers came to luncheon or dinner. When the conditions were favourable — those conditions which he knew nothing of, but guessed at vaguely — she loved, as he could see, to have people about her. She blossomed then as the rose. It was abundantly plain at such times that she was not meant by nature for the solitary life that had so strangely been forced upon her. And when she met his friends her manner was so exactly right with them, and they upon their part showed so unmistakeably their response to it, and to the charm which David was so proud of in her, that it was the more surprising that never of her own accord did

she invite them to his home. She never failed, it is true, to endorse his tentative invitation when he gave it, but always qualified it with the stipulation that its acceptance should be contingent upon the consent of parents or guardians as the case might be. David, a little humiliated, as she, we may be sure, sorely perceived, pointed out sometimes how unnecessary this was. Boys, he used to explain to her when he was younger, were allowed, to a greater extent than she supposed, to do as they liked. And when, as often happened, invitations came for him, there were hesitations, and always consultations with his father, before he was allowed, if he was allowed, to accept them. And always, always, behind all this, there was somehow the feeling that his mother could not help it, was not a free agent either . . .

Meanwhile another year passed after that which had seen him play Sebastian in the school theatricals, and, to his further pride and happiness, he stepped into leads with young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*. That was a proud moment for him and he forgot all his troubles. He worked day and night at his part and justified two people's belief in him — Tarpalin's which had given him the part, and his old friend's from the shop. But the old man from the shop shook his head more than ever.

"What did I say?" he said. "But there's some meant for one thing and some for another. What's it got to do with any of us? We're as we're born, I suppose, and they won't be able to stop you. But it's a pity you're not poor, sir, — some one who's got to."

"Got to what?"

"Make his way. Earn his living like."

"Oh, I have to do that," said David. He had never declared himself, but what he intended to do with his life was now, it may be seen, an understood thing between them.

"Not in the way I mean," said the old man. "When shall you tell them?"

"I don't know yet," said David.

"When are they coming to see you? What I can't understand, if you'll pardon the liberty, is why they don't."

It was what David could not understand either.

"Have they ever seen you?"

David shook his head.

"What I mean to say it would break it to them in a manner of speaking. It is n't, mind you, that you ought to be playing parts like this — not for another five or six years you ought n't. I'd have everybody go through the mill. Stock Company. General Utility. Anything, everything — see? That's how most of the big ones got there. In one sense the part's nothing. For me I could judge of you just as well in y' ten o' twenty lines, two years ago when you played the Tailor, as in what I call a limelight part like Marlow. For me this only endorses what I thought then and proves me right. But for most people, who judge by quantity whatever they think, it'd seem more of a test like of what you can do. You've made a success with it. As they'll have to know sometime, you might 'a' done worse than let 'em see y' in this Marlow of yours."

What pleased David most was that Tarpalin was pleased. Tarpalin looked upon David as his discovery.

"I knew you would," he said.

David looked upon Tarpalin as the agent of his chance. But for Tarpalin he might have been kicking his heels outside to that day.

Tarpalin said suddenly, "I wish we could give it again — at home, I mean. You and I in our parts, and three or four of the others. For a charity. The Hospital probably. Would you come?"

"Would n't I!" said David. And then felt annoyed that he should have to qualify this with a reflective "If I could, that is — if I find I could get away."

"Oh, you'd be able to do that, would n't you, if you wanted to?"

"I should certainly want to," David said, feeling, almost as he spoke, that that only made what he had in mind

worse. "I'd love to," he said then. "I should think I should be able."

"I'll write to you. By George, it would be fun. We'd have to get ladies for the women's parts, of course, but we could easily do that."

There was more talk. David went back to London the next day happy and expectant. A week passed; the eighth day brought Tarpalin's letter. The thing, it seemed, was as good as arranged. Most of the others would come. Would David? A note from Mrs. Tarpalin was enclosed cordially seconding her son's invitation.

Would there be difficulties?

He sat for a long time with the letters in his hand. As he had grown older, and as his friends had grown correspondingly older, he fancied that irksome restrictions had been relaxed somewhat. Perhaps his parents held that older boys might, indeed, be allowed to do as they liked. He was seventeen now, rising eighteen, and Tarpalin a couple of years older. It would be absurd if difficulties were raised. Perhaps there would be none. After much thinking he determined that if his mother objected he would not oppose her; but that if it proved to be his father who stood in the way of his accepting this invitation, he would at least demand his reasons.

He took the letters to his mother and laid them before her.

"I want to go," he said.

His mother read Tarpalin's letter first. She had not met him, but she knew him for one of David's heroes, as, by hearsay at least, she knew most of his friends, from all the Jonathans to the old man of the shop, the yearly Miss Vokins of Abraham's, and the (equally yearly) man from Kressler's. When she had read Mrs. Tarpalin's note she looked up, smiling.

"Yes, darling, of course you must go," she said.

He had been so prepared for some sort of demurring, for at least a referring of the matter to his father, that her un-

hesitating approval took him aback. She saw this and her eyes filled with tears. For, as we may guess, though he could n't, she, not knowing whether or not he really 'knew,' could n't explain to him that it was because the Tarpalins were people of the world, and would know what Penstephen it was that they were asking, that he might go to them safely.

He always remembered the night before he started for his visit to the Tarpalins. It was to be what might be called his first grown-up visit. He had developed extraordinarily, as even he himself could not have failed to be aware, in the last year or so. He had had new evening clothes made during the winter term — his first 'tails' — and, to break them in, and to the eloquent admiration of Georgina and his mother (and Betsy), he wore them that night. Mary, looking at him in them, realised suddenly, and with a curious stab at her heart, that she was now the mother of a man. He was as tall as his father, and had none of that callow gawkiness that so often characterises the transition stage from youth to young manhood. The lines of his figure, on the contrary, in the extremely well-fitting clothes, were clean and definite, and, Mary thought, quite unusually beautiful. She, like Georgina, could not take her eyes off him. Even his father gave him his approval.

"By Jove, David," he said, "you'll have to give me an introduction to that tailor of yours."

David coloured with pleasure, Mary saw, as he laughed and said, "Are they all right, Father?"

"Fit you like a glove," said his father.

But everything was right that night, not his clothes only. There was no tension, even when, after Georgina and his mother had gone to bed, he and his father were left alone. That, he supposed, was why he remembered. All the evening he was conscious of it — the feeling of well-being. It was not self-satisfaction — though it would be

vain to say that his very satisfying new appearance, with its immediate and successful appeal to the eye, had no part in it! — nor was it just the pleasurable excitement of anticipation. It was something more than these, though these undoubtedly contributed. It was a sort of realisation — the tension between him and his father being temporarily laid — of his home, and of what, under everything that disturbed him, this home of his meant to him. A veil seemed to be lifted from his eyes and his eyes allowed to see. All that they lighted upon was familiar. The warm lamplit room, the mellow brown walls of which, with their pilasters and mouldings, gave his mother so much pleasure; the hanging glass chandelier, which his father had refused to have replaced by one of the abominations which the use of gas had introduced into every other drawing-room; the flower-piece over the fireplace; the slender steel fire-irons in which the flames danced in reflection; the wine-colour of the curtains and of the brocade which covered the chairs and stools — these things, taken for granted generally as mere adjuncts to life, or parts of the background against which it was lived, showed themselves now not merely as the beautiful things that they were, but, like the little holland-covered box of the memories, upstairs in the lumber-room beside the outgrown little theatre of the inspirations, things in life itself, interested too and actively friendly. It was as if he suddenly saw them all to have souls. He sat by the fire, his book on his knee, dreaming happily.

His father broke in on his musings.

"How are you off for money, David? Five pounds any good to you?"

He was on his allowance now. Five pounds was five pounds — and a good deal more than five pounds! This was splendid of his father!

"All right, my boy, all right."

He would have liked to say something, but, conscious that the influences of the moment were all emotional and

therefore not quite to be trusted, he contented himself with repeating his thanks. He folded the note and put it into his pocket. But he went to his mother's room on his way to his own.

Betsy had just left her and she was sitting by the fire in a dressing-gown. A newspaper was in her hand. She had put it down as she heard his knock and his voice asking if he might come in. With her hair in the thick long tail into which Betsy always plaited it for the night, she looked — its visible greyness notwithstanding — almost like a girl.

"Father 's just given me five pounds," he said.

She was as pleased, he saw, as he was himself.

She put up her face to be kissed.

"Don't spend it all on theatres," she said, smiling. He knew that she thought he went to the play too often.

But, as he stooped to kiss her, he saw that she had been reading (again) the account of his performance in the recent theatricals.

"Next year," he said, "you'll have to come down for them. Why would n't you, this?"

"Darling, I never go anywhere."

"Well, next year you must. I shall make a point of it. You've never come down. It is rather beastly of you, Mummy, is n't it?"

"I've always wanted to go down."

"If I were of the huffy sort I should be rather sore about it."

But that was n't what he had come in to say.

"This five pounds," he said, and hesitated — "this five pounds that I 'm going to spend on theatres and riotous living. It 's frightfully decent of Father." He paused. "I wish you'd tell him."

"Why don't you tell him yourself, David?"

"I have."

He kissed her again and said good-night.

"Tell him all the same," he said.

What he was trying to let her know — the influences of

the evening working upon him, and the money meaning really far less as money than as evidence of his father's thought for him — was that when he came back things should be different. His father, if the fault had hitherto lain with David, should no longer be outside his life. He would let him into it if it should be in any way possible.

"Good-night," he said again.

The next day he went down to the Tarpalins.

THE THIRD BOOK OF DAVID

BOOK THE THIRD

CHAPTER I

TEN minutes after David's train had started his mother would have given a year of her life to recall him.

For the pleasure that it always gave her to be with him in his holidays, she had, at the last moment, when the cab was at the door, suggested half in play, half wistfully, that she should see him off at Paddington.

"Why should n't I? Shall I?"

David jumped at the proposal.

"Get your things. Quick, Betsy, Mother's coat and hat. I can give you two minutes."

"I can be ready in less than that," his mother cried, laughing, and, slipping past the bulkier Betsy, sped lightly upstairs to her room. She had her hat on before the panting Betsy reached her, and was back at the hall-door, in her coat and with her gloves in her hand, in less than sixty seconds all told. She, too, was panting a little, but none the worse for her haste. She was in great spirits now, and waved a laughing hand from the cab to the group on the doorstep as she and David drove off. Betsy reappeared just in time to shake a remonstrant finger, and David's mother laughed again.

"How foolish I am, are n't I, David?" (She said, "Are n't I.")

"I wish you were coming with me," David said.

She did not quite wish that, though she did wish, perhaps, that she were not to lose two precious weeks of his time.

David was in great spirits too. He had heard again from Tarpalin that morning. The theatre in the neighbouring town had been secured for the performance.

David, like the war-horse scenting battle, was eager and excited.

"All this acting," said his mother. "We shall have you going on the stage."

That was his chance, but he did not take it.

An idea struck him.

"Why should n't you come down for the night — to an hotel?"

It was a great idea. Even Mary thought it an idea. She would n't promise, but they played with it all the way to the station.

At Paddington, while he was getting his ticket and seeing to his luggage, Mary, still revolving the idea in her mind, went to the book-stall and bought some papers for him. As there was not too much time to spare, she asked a porter which platform the train started from, and having learnt its number made her way to it to wait for him there. When he appeared she saw that he also held a sheaf of papers.

"Oh, I'd got you some," she said, a little disappointed, but recovering herself at once. "Let me see what you have there and if you have any of the same ones, I'll take those back for your father."

By chance the *Morning Post* only was represented in duplicate, and the copy of this amongst her papers she kept. She opened it absently while she was standing at the door of his carriage, and, when he walked a few yards up the platform to ask a question of the guard, she turned it inside out and ran her eye over the news. He came back and she folded the paper once more, but without turning it back. He stood there talking to her, and she thought again how much a man he looked, and had a momentary pang as she knew that others beside herself would love him, and as fleeting a misgiving also as to what might be in store for him even now.

But it was not a day for misgivings. A clear winter sunlight penetrated even into the station. One of those rare days had dawned that morning which in mid-winter sometimes breathe a promise of spring.

There was a map in the compartment, and David, while he was waiting, jumped in to look at it. Red Alban, the Tarpalins' place, was in Shropshire. The station was Astonbury where he was to be met. He found it on the map. His mother said Red Alban was a pretty name for a place.

"Is n't it?" said David. "There 's a White Alban too. It belongs to Tarpalin's father as well, but it 's too big for them, so they let it."

"Don't get out again, darling. The guard 's shutting the doors."

But he did get out to kiss her.

"You 've got to come, mind. You 've got to come." He hesitated for a moment and added, "And Father too."

"We'll see, darling. We'll think about it. So much I will promise you."

"No, it 's not to be a question of thinking. You 're to come, do you hear, Mummy?"

"Yes, darling, I hear."

"I shall look for an hotel."

"No, David. No. You must n't do that."

"Why?" he asked her.

"It might be supposed — by your friends, you know — that we wanted to come," she said after a brief pause.

"You do," he said.

"But not to be put up somewhere. If you made enquiries . . . Don't you see? No, you can let me know just the name of an hotel. If we go, it must be at the last moment."

"All right," he said. "I see. So long as you do come."

He got back into the carriage and leant from the window. There was a further shutting of doors, the shrill sound of a whistle.

Mary waved to him till he was out of sight and then turned her face homewards. It was a pleasant idea, that of going down. It was in keeping with the beautiful day. How beautiful the day was! She would like to walk, she thought, — across the park, at any rate.

At the corner of Westbourne Street she noticed that she

was still carrying the paper. Did she want it, after all? She would give it to the crossing-sweeper, who, with his broom for the mud which was not there to sweep, was standing in the roadway a few yards ahead of her. Because, upon this beautiful day there was no mud to make his occupation profitable (but chiefly because David had looked so good-looking as the train bore him away!), she thought that she would give the man sixpence as well as the newspaper. She opened her purse, but the sixpence she wanted eluded her gloved fingers. She fumbled for it for some moments without success, so, turning the contents of the purse out on to the folded paper, she separated the coin from the rest which she put back, and then with the coin and newspaper was advancing toward the man when she stopped suddenly, a name on her lips.

White Alban!

She looked round her, perplexed.

Yes, David had spoken it. Yes, but since, since. Nay, that very moment. It had come to her from nowhere.

There was not any one near her. The crossing-sweeper, all unconscious of her benevolent intentions, had his back to her. A hansom was coming up the street, and a railway omnibus piled with luggage and bound probably for the station she had just left. The only foot-passengers which the street held besides herself were two girls on the other side of the road, and a postman at the extreme end of it.

"White Alban," she said to herself.

And then her eye fell upon the paper. She must have read the name in it unconsciously as she held it under her purse.

No, it did not seem to be there; and then suddenly, just as before, it was with her again. And then again she lost it, and then yet again it was there. The thing happened three times.

Then she knew where she had seen it. It was on the very edge of one of the folds. Owing to the way in which the

paper was folded she could only read half the paragraph which held it:

"— in residence," she read, "at White Alban in Shropshire, which she has rented for a term of years from Colonel Tarpalin."

She unfolded the paper to read the whole sentence. It was amongst the paragraphs in that column devoted to chronicling the comings and goings of the important or the merely vulgar, their engagements, or the breaking-off of their engagements, their illnesses or their convalescences, and the like. She was able now to read the whole sentence. The missing portion of it sent her hand to her mouth in sudden dismay, and her thoughts flying tumultuously to Brussels and Homburg.

"The Countess of Harbington," it ran, "has returned from Paris and is now in residence at White Alban . . ."

It was like a hand stretched out to drag the escaping swimmer down. It was like one of the relentless telegraph posts that (long long ago — almost it seemed in some former existence) had pulled the soaring wires earthwards. Twice this woman had touched her life with her inexorable stupid malice. No, her inexorable malignant stupidity. Brussels, Homburg, — was there no safety from her? The third time the blow would be struck at her through David . . . would be struck at David himself. She knew it. And in the same moment she knew something else. David did not know. He did not know, and it was for this that he had been kept from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, in his surprising ignorance! Oh, why, why had she not told him? Knowledge would not have saved him, she knew that. But it would have prepared him. The blow in the dark; that was what she had always feared for him; and that — oh, she knew this if in all her life she had never known anything before! — was what was now going to be dealt him.

She was presently in the park. How she got there she could hardly have told. There seemed to have been no in-

terval of time between the houses for a background and then the curving avenue of trees. There were people and there were carriages, and she turned back and into the greater quiet of Kensington Gardens. The wide stretch of grass on that side of the western end of the Serpentine was deserted save by a few children whose presence she scarcely noticed. She walked about aimlessly. The sunlight was everywhere. The grass was quite dry. She became conscious of an overpowering lassitude, and looked about her for a chair. There were no chairs near her.

She overcame her fatigue and walked round by the end of the lake to the beautiful glades beyond. Here she found a secluded chair and sat down.

Her mind began to work again. But it is significant that she did not try to persuade herself that her fears were groundless or foolish. She knew that they were neither. She knew, also, that nothing could be done. If she could have recalled David, she would have done so. A telegram might have caught him somewhere on his way, but it was a telegram which could not be sent. If she could have intercepted him herself, that would have been different. She journeyed after him in imagination, appearing before his startled eyes on some platform. 'David, you must come back with me. Or you must hear what I have to tell you, and then go on if you like. You must judge for yourself, but you must just know, so that things can't be sprung upon you.' How would he take it? If she could but hope that he would still go! Yes, that, at the back of everything, was her one hope. It was more than that, if she could have realised it. It was her unacknowledged belief. She did not know, as we do, that, conscious of his capacity for unhappiness, conscious too of its value to him as an artist, he cherished it, but did not intend that it should conquer him as a man. She did not know that, like the oyster, he meant to turn the grits in his life into pearls — that the nature, with which she herself perhaps had partly endowed him, did this for him, or at least helped him to do it for

himself. But in all her dread and her misery she must have had some sort of inkling that it was thus with him. If, then, she could have seen him! Or if she could but have seen the few lines in the paper but one quarter of an hour earlier! Then all would have been easy.

"David, here is something that makes it necessary that I should tell you, now, this moment, what I have put off and put off and put off telling you."

Too late. Nor could she write it to him. Imagine the effect of such a letter . . . in a strange house, amongst strangers, amongst people gathered together for amusement! That would be, indeed, to spring the knowledge upon him. It was not in human endurance to bear the shock of so sudden a revelation. He would want to hide himself in the first staggering moments. They would send up to his room, perhaps, where in fancy she could see him lying on his bed, his face in his hands or turned to the wall, to ask why he did not come down, whether he was ill, whether anything was the matter. She could hear his muffled answer telling them that he was all right, not ill, that he would be down presently. And the half-hours would go by and he would not be able to go down; or he would go down and know that they were all looking at him, and he would try to appear just as usual, as if nothing had happened.

No, not to be thought of, such a letter. She was powerless. Things must take their course.

An hour later she was still sitting in Kensington Gardens. The sunshine had not faltered. The west was reddening now, and the shadows of the trees were growing very long. The shadow of the man who was coming toward her now to collect the penny for her chair reached her many moments before he did. She still held the sixpence which she had meant to give to the crossing-sweeper. She paid for her chair with it, and, that he might not embarrass her with a handful of coppers, the man sought in his leathern

wallet for a threepenny bit. His action, as he fumbled for it, reminded her of her own in the pursuit of the sixpence she had just given him, and she lived again through the moment of her recent experience. She sat then with the ticket in her hand, looking after him and his long retreating shadow. The fingers of one of his hands were extended as his arm hung down, and the shadows of them as they passed over a smooth bare patch a few yards in front of her, were long as walking-sticks. A giant skeleton hand was silhouetted grotesquely before her. She watched how it dipped and swung as the longer trail of which it was part undulated over the unevenness of the ground. And as he stood beside her the man was rather a short man, she remembered, and the fingers that had fumbled for the threepenny bit were short, too, and blunt.

It was these observations more than any sense of the passage of time that recalled her to a realisation of the hour.

Even then she did not move at once. There were not many people about now — a few lovers, or couples rather in attitudes of love, on the chairs which stood, always in pairs, under the trees. The nurses and the children had all cleared away from the glades and open spaces. The west grew momentarily redder. There was going to be a wonderful sunset, the faint mists of London helping. From a rift in the clouds low on the horizon came sudden rays.

And then, at a moment when she had not even been conscious of her suffering, or that she was suffering, she was crying, crying desperately; a very storm of tears sweeping over her. Her sobs shook her. They were like the sobs of a child. She struggled for her handkerchief and pressed it over her mouth to stifle them.

Wave after wave broke over her. The pent emotions of years were finding outlet in the tears that gushed from her eyes, and the sobs that seemed wrung from her very heart. She had pushed up her veil, but it slipped down and was soon limp and sodden. For some minutes she wept thus,

and then, like a storm in the tropics, as suddenly as it had come upon her, the tempest passed.

She took off her gloves and unfastened her veil, which, after a moment's hesitation, she threw away. There was happily a second handkerchief in the pocket of her coat, and she dried her eyes and her face. She looked about her quickly but no one was watching her. The lovers, intent on their dallyings, had not observed her and were too far off to have heard her. She felt lighter now, extraordinarily relieved. All her sorrows had found expression in her tears, all her love. Not for David only had she wept, but for herself and Georgina and Johnny and John — oh, yes, and especially John. He had failed her in some strange way that she did not understand. Her pity for him was the more poignant. She saw him somehow standing quite alone. . . .

With the sunset the air had grown cold. There was a sound overhead, and a couple of wild ducks, their necks outstretched, passed across the shining face of the sun. They wheeled eastwards, then back toward the Serpentine. There had been sparrows and some starlings and a few pigeons on the grass searching for food. These were all gone now, but the tree under which she sat was alive with chirpings and twitterings. Soon it would be night. She shivered a little and rose to her feet. She felt stiff and chilled. Through the gardens sounded the cry of the park-keepers.

"All out. All out. All out" . . . a long-drawn cry.

It came from different parts of the gardens — a sort of Angelus. The couples rose. A straggling procession of people who had not seemed to be there trailed toward the gates.

CHAPTER II

David meanwhile sped toward Red Alban and whatever might be in store for him there. He had the compartment to himself and was very comfortably disposed in a corner of it, with his rug over his knees and his newspapers about him. As his mother and he between them had seen to it that he should have so many newspapers, he did little more than glance over the contents of any of them. Thus he did not see the paragraph which had so greatly disturbed his mother.

He looked out of the window and wondered, with the pleasant anticipation of pleasure, who would be at Red Alban, and who would play the parts which would not be filled by the boys who had played them before. He was at an age when a visit is an adventure, and the meeting of people an excitement.

He lifted his dressing-case down from the rack, presently, and putting it on the seat beside him, opened it and took from it a small drab-coloured paper book. It was out of shape from much handling, and the pages had a tendency to curl. It was his scored and pencilled copy of the play. He went through the whole of his part — hearing it to himself by reading his cues and covering up Marlow's lines with an envelope. Doubtful lines, and lines his own interpretation of which did not quite satisfy him, he repeated several times. He was practically word-perfect, he found, but there was still plenty to work at. He looked forward to the rehearsals.

Then the windows claimed him again. The winter landscapes, he thought, were very delightful. The bareness of the trees and of the hedges had its part in the charm of them. The trees shewed their delicate tracery against the clear sky. The hedgerows were brown, with a warm reddish

tinge, like dark hair that in certain lights shows itself to be not dark at all, but touched with copper. Ploughed fields were peculiarly beautiful. Rooks were busily at work in the furrows, and from time to time he saw plover. He imagined the cawings and the cryings which he could not hear. Smoke from cottage chimneys was richly blue. The day was full of colour. Sometimes a little church would whisk by. Sometimes it was a horse and cart on a road below him which would hold his attention for as long as it was in sight; or cattle or horses in a field. Some children in a garden waved to the train. Everything looked happy in the sunshine.

By degrees the sun sank in the heavens, and David, presently, was watching the sunset which witnessed his mother's tears in Kensington Gardens. By the time he reached Birmingham the evening had closed in.

At Birmingham he got out to stretch his legs and get himself some tea. The boy with the tea was some distance down the platform, and when David, a cup and saucer in one hand and a bun in the other, came back to his compartment he found it no longer empty. He had left nothing to shew particularly which seat he had been occupying, for his belongings had been strewn rather impartially about the cushions, so perhaps he could not reasonably complain that his seat had been taken. A young man sat in it. But surely the least the newcomer could have done, David thought, was to ask now whether the place he had appropriated had been free. This he did not do.

David, after the briefest pause, took the corresponding seat at the other end of the compartment. He finished his tea first and then collected his belongings about him. As his dressing-case was in the rack at the stranger's end, the significance of a new disposal of the things which the carriage had held must have been quite apparent. The stranger, however, made no sign of observing it.

The short twilight had waned in the ten minutes or so of the Birmingham stop. When the train left the lights of

the station, it ran into a dusk which soon became darkness. But this, half dusk, half darkness, made the conditions exactly right for the sight of the Black Country through which they were now passing, and, in the abounding interest of the views from the windows, his indignation began to cool. After all, what was it to him that a fellow-traveller, some one he had never seen before and in all probability would never see again, should be ill-mannered? Ribands of flame flapped upwards from a hundred scattered buildings. The crown of fire on some of the chimneys was like a flower. There was one like a water-lily of which the heart was red heat and every petal a flame. Some of the furnaces sent up a single tongue of gold. Some, so rhythmic was the leaping of their fires, seemed to breathe.

The train sped too quickly for David now. What remained of the sunset was like a perpetuation of these midland fires. By day this strange country shewed its ugliness, he knew. In reality it was a great wound in the earth's fair surface, a spreading sore which ate into the green of the countryside, fouling its waters and killing its trees. But evening transfigured it; night gave it mystery. Unsightly mounds of slag put on beauty as a garment. The dingiest shed took fitful colour from throbbing fires. There were black spaces here and there, like the unfathomed spaces in the heavens between stars and where no stars are visible. And then, beyond these, fires; and beyond these again, fires; and the glowings of fires reflected on the skies.

The train ran into Wolverhampton, and the Black Country was passed.

David became aware once more of his fellow-traveller. The young man was on his feet now, leaning out of the carriage window, blocking the door and the approach to the door. David did not, as it happened, want to get out, but if he had wished to, or even to look on to the platform, he could not have done so without asking him to move. A complete disregard of the possible inclinations of any one but himself marked his attitude.

It was again nothing, but again David was conscious of annoyance, and of something more than annoyance. Every line of the back that was presented to him was arrogant, insolent, an assertion or denial. It was a well-made back too, and encased in a well-made coat. A man, in such circumstances as the coat seemed to suggest for its wearer, had no excuse for such manners. With rising indignation and a tapping foot, David considered whether he should not cross the floor and oblige him to make way. If there were time, he thought, he would even like to get into another carriage. No, this would be to pay him too much attention. But he would make him move. He rose to his feet. At the same moment the guard's whistle sounded.

At least at Shrewsbury, where he had to change, he would be rid of him. He had seldom, he thought, taken such a dislike to any one — certainly not to any one with whom he had not exchanged a word. And then as before he gradually cooled down. It was ridiculous to let his feelings disturb him, absurd to allow the behaviour of a stranger to affect him at all.

It was growing chilly now. He turned up the collar of his ulster, pulled his rug up about him and closed his eyes. He would soon be at Shrewsbury.

He dozed as far, perhaps, as Wellington; woke finally to the sight of the dimly lit Severn below him. They were running into Shrewsbury. His fellow-traveller, it seemed, was alighting here also. As he was next to the door it followed that he got the first porter, and David had to wait till he could find another. But so glad was he to think that he had seen the last of some one so fundamentally uncongenial to him, that he welcomed rather than regretted the delay.

He managed after a little difficulty to get hold of a porter, and in due time found himself in the train for Astonbury. Three quarters of an hour brought him to that station.

It had been market-day at the little Shropshire town, and, though the bulk of the farmers and the country people generally that a market-day brings together, had been cleared off by earlier trains, there was still a considerable bustle about the platform. Women, with baskets on their knees or at their feet, sat on the benches, or, with their baskets on their arms, pushed their way toward the incoming train. Children dragged at skirts or were dragged at by flurried hands. Gaitered men, in weather-beaten coats and rain-stained or sun-browned felt hats, talked in groups, and were jocose or surly or indifferent according to their several natures. A few were a little drunk.

Into the midst of all this David stepped, and a few minutes later was following a footman to the brougham which was waiting to take him to Red Alban. It was a relief to him to find that he was to be its only occupant, for at the luggage van he had come face to face with his late fellow-traveller. The trifling coincidence, suggesting as it did the further probability of their being bound for the same destination, had caused him a discomfort, which, for the moment or two of its duration, was quite out of proportion to its importance. Actually it had no importance. As the brougham drove away he saw our unmannered friend get into a closed landau of old-fashioned but rather imposing appearance, which had evidently been waiting to receive him, and which took, David was glad to observe, a different direction from that in which he himself was being driven.

He tried, but not quite successfully, to put the whole incident from him.

The night in spite of a clear sky was dark, or looked dark from the inside of the brougham. There were stars he saw when he let down a window, but there was no moon. He watched the lights of the carriage lamps dancing on the hedges that seemed to stream by unendingly, and the gently swaying backs — a slim back and a stout back — of the servants on the box in their grey liveries. The road

presently climbed a steep hill which midway brought the horse to a walk, and then the hedges no longer seemed fluid, but jogged past the windows in short jerks. At what David would have thought the steepest part of the hill, the horse quickened his pace to the trot into which he broke automatically a few moments later as they reached the top of it. There was a mile or so of even ground then, and then another dip and a plunge into what looked like a dense forest, but was indeed but a narrow band of the Red Alban woods. Through thick darkness then, always in the circumscribed circle of light which here brought the trunks of trees one by one into rapid sight and one by one discarded them for others, and then a sudden emergence into open country once more. A straggle of houses presently — the outskirts evidently of a village; lights, more houses, a shop or two, a church, the village itself — Red Alban, as David heard the next day; and then a long stone wall, iron gates which admitted to a short gravelled drive, and the brougham had drawn up before a pillared and porticoed doorway.

The footman had hardly descended and rung the bell, before the door had opened, and Tarpalin was out on the steps giving David welcome.

"Now we shall be all right," he said; "we've got our leading man!"

He led David in, his arm affectionately round his shoulders. There was a sort of outer hall, where they were met by the butler and another footman on their way to the door (in the opening of which Tarpalin had forestalled them), and where David was relieved by them of his hat and coat, while Tarpalin waited.

"Now, come along," said Tarpalin, his hand on David's arm. "Jove, I am glad to see you. What sort of a journey? All right? It 's the devil's own nuisance having to change at Shrewsbury, though! I say, I *was* sorry not to meet you! I was just ready to start when old Harrowby who 's lending the theatre was announced, and I had to

stop and hear him jaw for half an hour to keep him in good temper. He 's only just gone."

He led the way across another hall, where a big fire was burning on an open hearth, to a room at the farther end of it. Here some half-dozen persons were assembled.

Mrs. Tarpalin gave David a very friendly fat hand and drew him to the fire. She was like her son in appearance, but had run to good-natured, and perhaps a little indolent, flesh. She was to play Mrs. Hardcastle in the forthcoming play, and had her part on the sofa beside her, as David saw, when she made a place for him there. Her three chins, he could not help thinking, would be invaluable to her as the mother of Tony Lumpkin. She introduced David to a girl with pretty twinkling eyes who sat nursing a sleeping kitten.

"This is Miss Davenport who plays Miss Neville for us. She has played it before, so we were as lucky to be able to get her as to be able to get you. Mr. Penstephen — Miss Davenport. There will be some fresh tea in a minute."

David bowed to Miss Davenport, and then turned back to his hostess to say he had had tea.

"But at Birmingham," she said. "As if that counted, and besides, here it is."

Two or three of his school-fellows were in the room, and these now came forward and greeted him. The party seemed all to be young.

Tarpalin brought him his cup, and the boys, and even Miss Davenport, who was near the tea-table, plied him with food. It was all very friendly and natural. David was conscious of a delightful quality in the atmosphere of the room. He was at home in it at once.

From a door the other side of it there came in now an elderly man, whom David guessed rightly to be Tarpalin's father.

"I thought I heard the carriage going round to the stables. Ah, yes. You have come, Mr. Penstephen. Don't get up. Go on with your tea. I 'm very glad to see you."

He held a billiard cue, and said no he had n't finished his game, in answer to an enquiry from his wife, and, to David, after a word or two more of cordial welcome, that he must go back now that he had shaken his hand.

"Theo 's beating me into fits," he said to his son over his shoulder, as he turned to go.

"She would," said Tarpalin.

David was asked if he played, but he said he did not.

"That 's right," Tarpalin said, "you 'll be much too busy for billiards. We 're going to work you all like niggers now we've got you. Are n't we, Mother?"

"I shall never know my words," said Mrs. Tarpalin plaintively.

"Who plays Tony?" David asked, — "Welwyn?"

"Welwyn. He 's in the billiard-room. Watching my father."

"Watching Theo," said his mother.

"Theo," said Tarpalin to David, "is Miss Nevern — your Kate Hardcastle."

The boys and even Mrs. Tarpalin looked at him as if to say, 'Wait till you see *her!*' Tarpalin, with his 'your Kate Hardcastle,' had spoken as if David was in luck.

Mrs. Tarpalin now said, with a smile for herself as much as for her son, "I don't think, in all the years I've been married to him, I've ever, before, known your father to play billiards in the afternoon."

"Theo," said Miss Davenport, "would make any one play anything, anywhere, at any hour."

The boys all grinned.

"You have n't met her yet, I think?" Mrs. Tarpalin said to David.

He shook his head.

"If I had n't promised myself that you should take me in to dinner to-night," she said, "you should take her, Mr. Penstephen. I'll put her on your other side."

"Father would never forgive you."

"That 's true," she said, — "nor Mr. Penstephen either,

for that matter. Gracious, and to-morrow night we shall have Eric here!"

It was Tarpalin who grinned then.

"He'll want to sit on both sides of her," he said.

The talk branched off to other topics; market-day at Astonbury, which always made the station unbearable; a local light railway, which had been mooted for years, and which Mrs. Tarpalin wished for and Colonel Tarpalin did not; the sunset that day which had been so beautiful that they had all walked to the top of the hill to see it.

Did Mr. Penstephen know Shropshire?

He did not.

Then they must show as much as they could of it while he was there.

Tarpalin said, "I won't have you taking him away from rehearsals."

Mrs. Tarpalin said, "And I won't have you working him to death. All work and no play —"

"Frank wants it to be all play," said Miss Davenport.

"All jolly fine," said Tarpalin. "We've exactly a fortnight. *You* try producing *She Stoops* in a fortnight!"

So they chattered.

The servants came in to clear away the tea-things, and the butler bowed over David to ask for his keys.

Soon after this a general move was made. Some of the party adjourned to the billiard-room, and Tarpalin went up with David to shew him his bedroom. Mrs. Tarpalin going to her own room, accompanied them as far as the top of the stairs.

"Does Mr. Penstephen know Eric?"

David appealed to Tarpalin.

"Do I?" he asked.

"Eric Dunstable. Do you?"

David shook his head.

"He 's Theo Nevern's cousin. He plays Hastings for us. He 's staying at White Alban. You'll meet him to-morrow."

"How he ever came to be Theo's cousin!" Tarpalin's mother said.

"I know you hate him," said Tarpalin. "But what could I do? Perman could n't have played Hastings here. He looked too young even in the school show — did n't he, Penstephen? And Eric was coming to White Alban. Anyway, he 's not in the house this time, so what does it matter?"

"Yes, he 's not in the house," said Mrs. Tarpalin. She turned to David. "Of course we 've all known him since he was a boy. (Dinner 's at eight. I do hope your room 's comfortable. I've put you near Frank. You 'll ask him for anything you want, won't you.) I never liked him and I never shall, but he 's a very good actor and I dislike his aunt still more. You 'll know what I mean when you see him."

Thus David had his attention fixed, as it were for him, upon two people whom he did not yet know. Frank Tarpalin shewing him to his room continued to talk of one of them. At the door of the room it was seen that a servant was still unpacking, so they went into Tarpalin's room till he should have done, and here Tarpalin talked still more.

"I 'd have given anything to keep him out of it. But there 's Theo. She wanted him, — most perversely, for she does n't really like him. And there 's that horrid old woman at White Alban who would have been offended if we 'd offended him, and we want her silly patronage for the sake of the Hospital."

"Who 's the horrid old woman?" asked David.

"Oh, Lady Harbington," said Tarpalin.

Something stirred in David faintly, something fast asleep — waking?

And then, like his mother, though without at once knowing why, he in turn was whisked back across the years to Brussels and to Homburg. The sense of being lifted from a warm bed in the middle of the night was certainly present to him for a moment; of being washed and dressed by

candle-light (soap in your eyes, fingers straining at your buttons!); of the unusualness — the unnaturalness — of activities very early in the morning — a yawny feeling; the taste and scent of raw air on the way to a station; the smell of a cold early train, so entirely different from the smell of a later warmed one. He had lived through these happenings at some time — ages and ages ago — and was living through them again. Was n't there some one nice — a waiter, yes, a waiter — who had waved to him from behind the curtain of a window? He saw his father's face, grim — wearing the unapproachable look; his mother's? — oh, the look that he used to know; Betsy's; and he saw, of course, the holland-covered box; a chicken tied up with ribands — remembered the taste of chicken which you 'ate in your fingers,' dipping the bone, which you were allowed to 'pick' (because a meal in a train was so different from a meal at a table where you had knives and forks), into your own particular little portion of salt on a bit of paper for a plate. Why did he suddenly remember these things? And, as suddenly, not exactly Katinka, but the going of Katinka, his marred birthday party, the mask, even, thrust into a drawer; and the sight of two ladies who sat on a seat in the Kurgarten at Homburg and argued . . . and stopped arguing . . .?

Ten years since he had heard the name. But he remembered . . . remembered, though he had not understood.

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING akin to excitement held David after Tarpalin had shewn him to his quarters and left him. In the beautifully proportioned room, with the Queen Anne furniture which he appreciated without wholly perceiving, he dressed quickly as if he had some reason for wishing to be down early. Under the skilful arrangement of his belongings by the servant who had unpacked for him, everything was exactly where his hand fell upon it most readily. No time had to be wasted in hunting for this or for that, or even in changing what had been put out for him for what had not. What had been put out was in every instance what he wanted. So it came that of the men of the party he was down first. Afterwards, it was as if he must have known that, by the fire in the hall, he would find reason alike for his haste and his excitement.

A girl was standing by the great open hearth. She turned at the sound of his steps on the polished boards. He did not know what other girls there might be in the house, but he knew at once as he approached her that this was Miss Nevern.

"You 're Mr. Penstephen," she said to him. "I should have known you from Frank's description."

David said boyishly that he would like to know what Frank had said.

"Ah, no," said Miss Nevern.

She looked very straightly at you. That was his first impression of her.

He did not say, 'You 're Miss Nevern.' There was no need. He came over to her and they looked at each other, the light of the flames dancing on their faces.

("Theo," he heard Miss Davenport saying, "would make any one play anything, anywhere, at any hour.")

What was it about her? Not beauty — or not beauty only. Miss Davenport was much better-looking. But it was not of Miss Davenport that any one would have said what Miss Davenport had said of her; and it was not of Miss Davenport that Tarpalin would have said that 'Eric,' whoever he was, — or any one else, — would want to sit on both sides of her. Miss Nevern was twenty, perhaps, but years of victory over every one lay behind her; years of such victories were before her. She was an innocent mischievous Ninon de l'Enclos, who would have lovers at eighty.

We are not to suppose that David at seventeen-and-a-half was going to be her lover. Love, as love is understood, does not come into this part of David's life at all. Friendships, as romantic as you please, had claimed him long since, and would claim him again. But love — time enough for love in the years still before him.

If, however, we have been able to realise anything of the appeal of his looks at this period, of his strong slim young body with its mixture of boyishness and strength, — slenderness and muscle, — his strong-looking throat on which the head was set so attractively, the rather melancholy eyes which his mother had given him, and the boyish laugh which was his own, we shall understand that to so experienced, albeit so young, a natural huntress as the curious girl he was admiring so frankly, he stood for very desirable quarry indeed.

Theo Nevern was of those who are born to play havoc with hearts. She had roguish eyes and a plaintive little mouth. The eyes invited, provoked, challenged; the mouth, with the tremulous lips of a child, was a plea for compassion.

They continued to look at each other, as the light of the flames, dancing like the lights of the furnaces, continued to play on their young faces. At the back of David's mind was the knowledge that in a minute or two some one else would come down and the spell be broken. In some strange

way he knew that, though he was not nor ever would be in love with her, these were perhaps the most wonderful moments that he had known in his life.

What was it about her?

It seemed quite natural and not even impertinent to hear himself putting his thought into words.

She looked at him oddly then.

"You, too?" she said and shook her head. The roguishness went out of her eyes. It was as if it was with her pathetic mouth only that she spoke.

What she said next was really extraordinary.

"Eric comes to-morrow," she said. She did not even say 'Mr. Dunstable.' She must have been speaking to herself.

"I've heard of him also," David said.

"What have you heard of him?"

It was David now who said "Ah, no."

"They don't like him here," she said — "even Mrs. Tarpalin who likes everybody."

"But you do?"

"He's not like any one else."

It may have been just for the sake of the sound of the words themselves that David said —

"Then he must be like just one other person."

"Eric like me? You don't know him — or do you?"

David shook his head.

"I had never heard of him till this evening."

"You would n't have said that if you had."

There was a little pause.

"He's one of the most disagreeable people I know. He makes one angry. One could strike him — be glad to see him struck — in the face. His face is so" — she hesitated for a word — "so insolent. It's that that is so desperately — no, I won't say it."

But she had said it. It was extraordinary that she should have said it — more extraordinary than either of them knew then.

"It 's because of that, you mean?"

She nodded slowly.

"While everybody else . . .!"

She appeared to think this over, but finally nodded again.

"We make each other furious," she said.

Some realisation of the extraordinariness of what she was saying seemed to come to her, for she gave a little exclamation and said abruptly, "How do we come to be talking like this? How did we begin?"

"I can't remember," said David.

He could not. It all only seemed quite natural.

"I believe —" he began and broke off.

She looked at him, waiting.

"He 's at White Alban, is n't he? — Mr. Dunstable, I mean."

"Yes."

"That 's near here, somewhere?"

"About five miles."

"Was he arriving to-day?"

"Yes. Why?"

"So that 's Mr. Dunstable! We were in the same train. We travelled part of the way in the same carriage. So that 's —"

"I should think it is most probable," said Miss Nevern. "If he struck you as being extremely repellent I should say it was certainly Eric. Anyway, you 'll know to-morrow. But not till to-morrow."

Her eyes, the roguishness coming into them again, held him and released him. Some of the others were coming, and the spell was broken. Not till afterwards did David realise how curious the experience had been.

It was Frank Tarpalin who came into the hall now with two of the boys.

"I went to your room to look for you," he said to David, "but I saw you had come down. You know Miss Nevern?"

"We introduced ourselves," said she.

The gong was sounded somewhere nearby as she spoke, and the hands of all went to their ears.

"I ought," Frank said, "to make you all work after dinner. We could take the scenes that don't want everybody."

But "No, no," said Miss Nevern. "We start work to-morrow. Don't we, Mr. Penstephen? We face realities then. For to-night we enjoy ourselves."

"If there 's one thing certain it is that you'll do as you like, Theo dear," Frank said. "Your stage-manager may make up his mind to that, may n't he?"

He put his hand lightly on hers. David, who was really fond of his friend, was yet conscious, to his own surprise, of a momentary but quite appreciable twinge of pain. Jealousy of any sort was so foreign to his nature that the incident, trifling as it was, seemed to expose him uncompromisingly to himself, and even, though surely inconsequently, to throw a reflected light upon Miss Nevern — a light, nevertheless, by which he saw her for a brief instant very clearly. He stooped and picking up a bit of wood thrust it into the heart of the fire. When he looked up Frank's hand had been withdrawn. David felt penitent and very much ashamed of himself. He was not happy again till Frank's arm was linked with his.

But he had realised Miss Nevern. You could not be unaware of her any more than you could help liking her. If you had been in love with her you would still have liked her. A more curious thing was, perhaps, that the other girls in the house liked her — there were two, it appeared, besides Miss Davenport; a Miss Aylmer, Lucy, and a Miss Blake, Emma, who now joined the group by the fire, and clustered, with Miss Davenport who came in a moment later, round the all-eclipsing Theo. He listened to them now.

"You 've done your hair differently, Theo."

"So she has."

"Let me see."

"And me."

"Theo!"

"Like it?"

"You look heavenly. Mrs. Tarpalin, look, Theo's done her hair the new way. Does n't she look an angel?"

"Theo always looks nice," Mrs. Tarpalin said, and brought sensibleness back to the hearth. But David knew that she, too, was devoted to Miss Nevern.

All through dinner he was conscious of her. He was separated from her by the whole length of the table, but he never lost acute sense of her presence. Colonel Tarpalin had taken her in to dinner, and one of the school-boys who were staying in the house sat on her left. It was a sort of relief to David that this boy should be Hullway, who was younger than himself, and not Welwyn, who was older. He recognised the significance of this relief, but it did not make him ashamed, as the momentary pain which his friend had caused him had made him ashamed. But, like the sudden disconcerting twinge of pain, it was nevertheless tribute to the girl's curious power. While he answered his hostess's questions and talked to her — about his school mostly, the recent theatricals (which she had witnessed), Frank, the school sports, the Glee Club, the games, his tastes and the like — he just went on being conscious of Theo. He managed not to look too often in her direction, and he knew that she hardly looked in his at all. Not once, from the soup to the dessert, did he catch even the tail of her roguish eye. He was inclined to be a little bit offended. When he thought of their extraordinary conversation . . . for it had been extraordinary . . . or was it only her way of dealing with him?

That thought pulled him up with a jerk. And was this too only her way of dealing with him?

He saw how differently she dealt with Colonel Tarpalin

who was telling her his best stories. Her mouth asked for no pity with him. The childish droop of the lips was gone. The lips were parted in smiles or in laughter. She had adorable teeth — like the finest porcelain, only more transparent. They were strong, too, though their whiteness made them look fragile — as if, like porcelain, they would chip easily. And from time to time she turned to Hullway, and made him happy with a word or a laugh or a look. And sometimes she contrived that the talk at her end of the table should be general, and one or another of her admirers would be made happy also.

But not a look for David, to whom so short a time ago she had said, "You, too?" and "Eric comes to-morrow," and the other words that had been so unusual and so curiously intimate. When he had sat down to dinner he felt that he, who knew her not at all, knew her better, perhaps, than any one else in the room. To no one else at least could quite the same confidence have been shewn or given, in quite the same way. Well, was that just her way with him?

He had a sudden sense of his own inexperience, and felt humiliated; and as immediate a sense of the experience which must be hers, and felt angry.

She might anyway just look at him. But she did not.

Mrs. Tarpalin had turned to Welwyn, who was on her other side, and David heard her pleasant "Now, tell me," as he crumbled his bread.

The long table gleamed with silver and glass. The room was brown, panelled, not unlike the dining-room in Cheyne Walk and of about the same period. It was of course very much larger. It had the same long narrow windows. Like his bedroom, it was beautifully proportioned. The dinner-table was lighted with candles; the rest of the room was in shadow, except at that end of it where the sideboard was, and the great screen of Spanish leather which hid the door at which the servants entered. You could only dimly see the portraits on the walls.

David noted these details in his determination not to let his eyes stray toward Miss Nevern.

His neighbour on the other side, disentangling herself from her own partner at the feast, now claimed him.

"Was n't it sporting," she said, "of Frank Tarpalin to get up these theatricals? When he asked me to act I simply jumped. I'm only playing the Maid, you know, but one gets all the fun in a small part without any of the responsibility. Frank Tarpalin says you 're frightfully good. No, don't deny it. He says you are."

And then she took him aback with "What do you think of Miss Nevern?"

"I have n't seen her," he answered, choosing to think that she meant Miss Nevern's acting.

"No, no," said Miss Aylmer, "I did n't mean that. I meant of Theo herself."

However, she answered for him.

"I think she's perfectly lovely," she said, "don 't you? She's far and away the prettiest girl in this part of the world. They live near Astonbury, you know, but she's hardly ever at home. Everybody wants her, you see. She's always staying about. You have n't seen her dance yet, have you?"

"No."

"Perhaps we shall dance after dinner. I do hope so, don't you?"

It was all chatter, but it recovered David's spirits for him. He allowed himself to look down the table.

Mrs. Tarpalin at this moment returned to him.

"Now, Ettringham," she said, "tell me. I was at school with Lady Penstephen — Susan Cantrell she was then. I have n't seen her for years, now. She's your aunt, would it be, or your cousin?"

"Cousin," David said — "that is, her husband was my father's first cousin."

"I remember going over to Ettringham years ago when I was staying near Warwick. We drove over to luncheon,

I think. The house fascinated me, I recollect. Has n't it been very curiously and yet very successfully added to?"

"I believe so," David said. "I've heard so."

"I've never seen it," he added after a moment.

For the first time it struck him as curious — really curious — that he had not. The natural thing would surely have been that he should, at least, have had Ettringham as a topic to discuss with any one who should speak of the place to him. And he had not even that.

"I never met Sir Joseph. He was away — fishing, if I remember rightly. He was drowned fishing, was n't he? And his only son. So dreadful. How many years ago is that? Eight or nine, I suppose. I remember so well reading the account in the papers. Somewhere in Ireland, was n't it?"

David remembered too. He was fated to be whisked back to Homburg, it seemed, that evening. He remembered Frau Finkel's room with the grained woodwork and the big gold-framed 'mirrors,' and the chair which he had broken, and the telegram and the curious effect of the telegram. It was from then that the real changes had dated, though they had seemed to date from so much later. His father and mother had been away, and there had been the strange day of what Betsy had called the Rejoicing. How it had rained on the day of the Rejoicing! He remembered that too. And his mother, who had looked anxious at the sight of the telegram, had looked frightened when she heard its contents.

How vividly he remembered.

Mrs. Tarpalin was speaking.

"I should greatly like to see Susan Cantrell again. I wonder whether I could induce her to come here. I think I must write to her. Yes, I'll write and tell her you 're staying here."

Somehow David felt that the conversation was becoming uncomfortable. He did not know why he should feel this, but he did. Mrs. Tarpalin thought, it was clear, that he

made a bond, or at any rate a link. And though he knew of no reason why he should not, he knew that he made neither. Why *had* he never been asked to Ettringham? It was surely strange that he had not, for Johnny was often asked there. Why did his mother not go there now? His father went from time to time. He felt constrained to tell Mrs. Tarpalin that he had not met his cousin, and after a moment's hesitation he did so.

Her surprise was so genuine that she had shewn it before (as it seemed to him — and as he would have expressed it to himself) she knew what she was doing.

"But surely — " she began, and broke off.

"No," he said, "oddly enough, I've never seen her. I don't think she ever comes to London, and you see I've never been to Ettringham."

"Well," said Mrs. Tarpalin, smiling, and mistress once more of her wits, "all I can say is that we have the advantage of her at Red Alban."

She gave David a look, as she spoke, that he felt he ought to have been able to interpret, but could not. It seemed to hold more than the kindliness which was so clearly defined in it. No doubt about the kindliness. There was something protective in that — almost affectionate, almost what is known as motherly. What else there was, what else that was to which he lacked the key, seemed as if it must be — though why should it be? — an unspoken criticism of his relation.

She said no more about asking her old school friend to Red Alban, and when she spoke next, which she did immediately, it was to change the conversation.

David, mystified and perplexed, listened to, or at least heard, her reasons for desiring the light railway.

"If you were a housekeeper, and lived five miles from a fishmonger who never has anything, you would understand," she said. "And, oh, how I envy you, living as you do in London, with everything at your very doors. It was the dream of my life when I was a girl to live in London, so

of course I married a soldier and had to follow the drum all my young days, and just when I might have hoped to settle down in Kensington Square — I had always intended it to be Kensington Square! — my husband came in for what they call down here the Coloured Albans, and here I am a country woman for the rest of my natural life."

Dinner drew to an end. The servants put the decanters upon the table and disappeared. As the party was entirely young, Mrs. Tarpalin had no more important eye to catch than Miss Nevern's. David, who had not once been able to catch it, saw that his hostess caught it without difficulty. He was quite certain then that the withholding of her gaze was not unintentional. And then, just as she was passing him, she gave him a smile all to himself and took him captive once more. When Theo Nevern smiled at you . . .

He turned back to the table in a happy dream.

Yes, his vanity only, and his boyish vanity at that, for his heart — even his heart of a boy — was not touched. What her smile had done was to put him once more on good terms with himself. In spite of his physical development which allowed him to play a man's part on the stage, and perhaps off the stage too, he was quite as young as his seventeen-and-a-half years, or he would probably have seen in her smile (bestowed after it had been withheld) but a further instance of her way of dealing with that one of her admirers who happened to be David Penstephen. He was, however, and he did not. His spirits rose at a bound.

Colonel Tarpalin had moved now and was hospitably busy with the decanters — a purely nominal hospitality, for the party was too young to make wine the real occupation of the moment. The 'What are you drinking's?' were cordial but not unduly pressing.

"Mr. Penstephen, another glass won't hurt you. Well, half a glass, then. Frank, has Mr. Welwyn all he wants?"

They were spared, or not indulged in, the half-hour's talk about vintages, which in those days would still have followed if his guests had been older. Claret, as well as port wine, was still drunk after dinner; the cigarette only beginning then to revolutionise the men's hour.

Frank Tarpalin, however, — young modern! — brought out his cigarette case. His father never lit his cigar till he was in the smoking-room. Ladies were still supposed not to like the smell of smoke.

"To be sure, Frank. Yes, not a bit. Mr. Penstephen, you will smoke, and Mr. Welwyn —? No, Mr. Hullway, I won't split on you — nor on you, Mr. Filston, if you can see your way to reconcile the vicious act with your own conscience. Let me tell you, though, all of you, that you 're ruining your palates." He shook his head. "England is changing, Mr. Penstephen. I see the time coming — no, it won't be just yet, maybe — when a taste in wine, discrimination, a fine appreciation of shades and meanings, will be things of the past. We've got away from abuses, I grant you. Our grandfathers' days — the two-bottle men, yes, and the three; loosened cravats; more than just legs under the mahogany; more than just a loosening of cravats! Shocking. Most reprehensible. But a real palate, the educated tongue of a gentleman, a perception of, and for, what I might call the poetry of the grape . . . Ah, a different thing altogether . . . going, too, going, presently to be gone. A pity, I think, and you help it on its way. There, Frank, your father's protest. He was once as young as you. Enjoy your cigarettes."

Hullway, not to be done out of one good thing by another, sipped his claret as he smoked; and Filston who could not resist the delights of chocolate-creams, a dish of which was at his elbow, added them to the joys of tobacco.

"Well, well," said Colonel Tarpalin, "who knows but you 're right?" And, like Mrs. Tarpalin a few minutes earlier, turned to David with a question about Ettringham. The shooting used to be very good in Sir Joseph's

time, Colonel Tarpalin had always heard. Did Lady Penstephen preserve much game there? Difficult, of course, always, for a woman. How had her pheasants done that year?

David knew, it chanced, that the Ettringham shooting was let. He was able, therefore, to make answer without hesitation.

"Ah, it generally comes to that," said his host. "The men of the family, however, might have wished otherwise, eh? Your father, for instance, and now of course there 's yourself."

But David did not shoot.

"It 's the difficulty of the keepers," Colonel Tarpalin went on. "A woman can't look after them, can't know how to, can she? I have trouble enough myself. If Frank would allow me I 'd let the White Alban shooting and content myself with what I have here."

David hoped the talk had left Ettringham. For some reason he did not want to have to say again that he had never been there. But he had to. Colonel Tarpalin spoke of the house and its interesting oddness.

"Yes," David said, "I know, of course, but I have n't seen it."

As before this caused surprise.

"No, I 've never been to Ettringham."

To cover what seemed a momentary awkwardness he drew on his slender knowledge.

"General Burke has the shooting — a neighbour; my little brother's godfather. My father has shot there with him."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. General Burke. Yes, Owen Burke — the 60th — no, the Horse Artillery, was n't it? Let me see. Windlebury, is n't that the name of his place? A fine old house, I believe, but not much land. Ah. He has the shooting."

There was a desultory moment. Colonel Tarpalin, seeming to turn things over in his mind, took a walnut and

looked about for the nut-crackers. They were near David, who handed them to him. He cracked his nut and peeled its kernel, talking the while of pheasants and partridges, hares and rabbits, and then forgot to eat it. David knocked the ash from the end of his cigarette, and, with his dessert knife, pushed the ash about upon his plate, fitting it to the outlines of a flower in the pattern.

Afterwards David wondered whether there had really been any pause before, lest he should have seemed to impute inhospitality to his relation, he explained that the rest of his family had been to Ettringham. It was only he who had not been there — oh, yes, and his sister.

"It's babies she adores," he said. "I think she'd like to have my little brother there always." He thought of Johnny and smiled to himself. "Any one would," he said.

"How old is he?" Colonel Tarpalin said. This was a question one might ask.

David told him to a day.

"But he was a baby quite lately," he added, smiling.

"They have a charm, have n't they, young things?" said Colonel Tarpalin. "All young things." And, "Well, well," he finished, with his wife's look and almost with her very words, "we have the advantage of your cousin, Mr. Penstephen."

Ten minutes later he remembered his walnut, ate it, emptied his glass, and proposed, if no one would have any more wine, that they should join the ladies in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER IV

AGAIN for David the sense of meanings which escaped him. He had, moreover, the same feeling as before that, in some way which he did not understand, his cousin at Ettringham was held to have laid herself open to criticism. Whatever this criticism was, it appeared to react favourably upon himself. He had, he knew, made a favourable impression upon his hosts at the start, but the favour they both showed him had perceptibly, and quite unaccountably, increased. The curious thing was that this should have shewn itself, not in the attitude of one of them only, but in that of each of them and in exactly the same manner. They had both looked a sort of protective warmth at the friend of their son. Though he did not understand it, it contributed to his present comfort. He forgot that there had been two moments which had not seemed quite comfortable. He was very happy at Red Alban.

The ladies were found, not in the drawing-room, but in the billiard-room, using that as a passage to the music-room which was beyond it. Miss Nevern and Miss Aylmer — Theo and Lucy — were playing a game of Fifty up; Miss Blake — Emma — marking for them and hanging with Oo's of admiration upon Theo's strokes. Mrs. Tarpalin sat by the hearth, winding a skein of wool which Miss Davenport was holding for her. All these ladies, as the men came in, looked up or looked round, except Theo, who chalked her cue.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to dance," Mrs. Tarpalin said. "We're waiting for the fire to burn up in the music-room. (Sure your arms are n't tired?" — to Miss Davenport.) "Just see, Frank, if the room's warm — really warm, mind. You'll all keep warm enough. It's your

poor old bird of a mother at the piano I'm thinking of."

"Oo! Well played! Good stroke!" — little shrieks from the worshipping Blake. "Oo! Oo! Did you see that?"

"Such bias in the marker is n't fair," wailed the Aylmer, who was indeed playing a losing game. "It 's calculated to put me off my stroke."

"If you get another stroke," cried the Blake. "Oo — Theo's in for one of her long breaks. You are, Theo, I 'm sure of it. Oo!"

And Theo seemed to be. David, watching now, marvelled at the ease with which she brought off what often looked so difficult. Colonel Tarpalin had come over to watch, too. Gradually all lined up to watch, except the two who were concerned with the wool-winding, and they watched over their shoulders.

Frank came back to say the fire was burning satisfactorily and the room quite warm.

"Really warm?" his mother asked.

"Even over by the piano."

Theo put down her cue.

"To the ball, then!" she said.

"No, no," they all protested, "finish your break."

"No." She shook her head. "The game 's drawn. Come along, Frank, I 'm going to dance with you."

"Not till I've done my winding," said the band.

"Go on, Theo, finish."

They could not prevail upon her.

"I 'm going to play for you till Mrs. Tarpalin is ready. Come along, Colonel Tarpalin, bring your cigar into the music-room. Give these young men a lead."

"No, no, Theo, you must dance." The worshipping Emma reached the piano first. She broke into the waltz of the moment.

Theo swayed to the rhythm of it, and, though she had told Frank Tarpalin that she would dance with him, it was to David that she gave herself. David took Frank's

laughing punch in the ribs, as he caught her, and, laughing too and a little bit flushed with the pleasure her choice of him gave him, danced away with her.

"Traitors both of you!" Frank called after them.

Welwyn danced with Miss Aylmer. Frank threw the other two boys at each other, and, giggling, and with the gainly ungainliness of calves or puppies or colts or other young animals, they took the floor together, while he went to fetch Miss Davenport and to hurry his mother.

He returned with Miss Davenport, having wrested the wool from her, and left his mother, who would not be hurried, winding it from the unhelping back of a chair.

"I knew you could dance," Miss Nevern said to David.

"Only because I care for it," said David. "I get no practice."

He thought on as he danced. He liked all that you did with the suppleness of your body — skating, swimming. It was the control of your body in dancing, was n't it, that made the joy of dancing? The response of your body to your will, and to something more than your will. Yes, and in the response of another body to your own. His partner was easy to steer, answering like a horse with a delicate mouth to a lightest hand on the bridle. The two, as the old novels used to say, moved as one. Yes, David could dance, and so could Miss Nevern. Mrs. Tarpalin coming in now, her wool-winding finished, stopped at the door to watch them. Welwyn and Miss Aylmer stopped; Frank and Miss Davenport. There were left dancing the two giggling, pulling boys, and David and Theo. The giggling boys stopped, and there danced on David and Theo.

"They 're watching us," David whispered, half smiling.

"What does it matter?"

They danced the dance to the end.

Miss Blake — Emma — could play. Mrs. Tarpalin could play too, but with a difference. It takes a dancer, perhaps, for dance music, and Miss Blake, David found,

her Oo's notwithstanding, could dance. She had the lightness of foot of most fat persons. Mrs. Tarpalin may have had it when she followed the drum; but many drums had been beaten since then, and her waltzes were of the tum-tum-tum order. Not till Miss Blake played again, when Theo Nevern shamelessly threw over one of the nice calves or puppies or colts for David, did David get such another dance as had opened the evening's proceedings.

He was now enjoying himself greatly. Miss Nevern made no pretence of not counting him her best partner. She, *prima ballerina assoluta* of all the balls of the neighbourhood, might speak, and spoke.

"You'll have to spare Mr. Penstephen to us next year for the hunt ball," she said to Mrs. Tarpalin, before him.

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Tarpalin. "Mr. Penstephen, if we can induce him to come down for it, will come to us. Theo! This is positive poaching. I never heard of anything so unblushing."

It was the happy David who did the blushing. Nothing in all life so delightful, perhaps, as the sense of being wanted; nothing so flattering to young vanity. All the promises are here. Impossible not to enjoy his 'success.'

So the evening passed. David's ears should have burned later.

In two rooms at Red Alban that night David was the topic of conversation.

The girls congregated by Theo's fire.

"He *can* dance," said Emma Blake.

"*Can't* he!" said Lucy Aylmer.

"He's very good-looking," said Miss Davenport.

They looked at her gratefully. That seemed to be what they both meant.

"He's got the most beautiful hands," said Miss Aylmer at once. "I was noticing them at dinner."

"I noticed them too," said Emma, and forgot her Oo's in the soft influences of the moment. "They're so expressive. They really say things, don't they? Should n't you

think he was a poet? Or do you think they ought to paint pictures?"

Theo did not say anything. She was in a pensive mood, but seemed to like hearing the others talk. A gentle melancholy came over them. These young girls — Theo perhaps excepted — were ready to be quite frank with themselves and each other. They were in love with love, and inclined to think themselves in love with David. In their dressing-gowns and with their hair down, they looked, in the firelight, like a detachment of the Twenty Lovesick Maidens, or, since it was Theo's fancy to sit in the firelight and they had all blown out their candles as they came in, like four — perhaps only three — of the Wise or Foolish Virgins.

"Hands mean so much."

"I think they 're hands for the piano."

"Or the violin."

"Yes, I can see him playing the violin. Have you ever been over a china factory?"

Emma and Lucy had not. Theo did not answer.

"You see hands like his there."

"Potter's hands!"

"Yes, hands bred to whiteness and slenderness by the generations of hands that have preceded them. Father to son, father to son. Delicate sensitive work — moulding, turning on the wheel. The vessel rising up under the inspiring long fingers. The man who made the cup which I bought for a memento, had hands like a Botticelli angel. The cup seemed to be drawn up under them as they only hovered over it. I have the cup now. When I look at it I can always recall the magic."

"A cup. That 's it. That really is it. I can see his hands holding a Chalice."

"Priest's hands?" Theo spoke suddenly.

"Not exactly. I was thinking of the Graal."

"Oh, Sir Galahad."

"Well?"

Theo shook her head.

"They 're strong hands."

"That 's why I thought the violin."

"Or the piano."

"I see them holding a skull," said Theo.

"Hamlet," said Emma Blake enthusiastically. "You mean they 're actor's hands."

She nodded.

"But we 've to see whether he can act. We shall see tomorrow."

"They are strong hands," said Miss Aylmer. "I 'm sure he 's strong. You can feel that he is when he 's dancing with you. He holds you so well. Frank 's strong, too, but then he 's thickset, would n't you say? A sailor's figure. He dances well and he holds you comfortably. But not like Mr. Penstephen."

"Is n't David a wonderful name?" said Emma. "A king's name, is n't it?"

"A psalmist's. Your poet, Emma. Good for you!"

Miss Blake sighed happily.

"But I agree with Theo," she said. "I do see him holding a skull."

There was silence upon that. The girls had all fallen into attitudes fitting their tender mood — all except Theo, who, though she was pensive, sat upright. Miss Aylmer's face might have been bowed over a harp or a lute or other rather mournful instrument of music. Miss Davenport's head was supported on her arm. Emma's two hands were folded upon her breast.

Presently one by one they spoke again.

"He could n't, you know, be ordinary with that appearance."

"Would you call him dark or fair?"

"He would be dark or fair according to which one admired. I should call him fair — not as fair, of course, as Frank Tarpalin, but fair."

Miss Davenport said this.

"Oh, would you?" said Miss Aylmer. "I think of him as dark."

"How do you think of him, Theo? As dark or fair?"

"I don't know that I do think of him."

"Theo does n't have to think of people," said Emma. "People think of Theo. I wonder whether *they* talk of us."

"They?"

"Men."

"There is n't one in the house," said Theo. "We 're talking of boys. Do we realise that he 's a schoolboy! If we don't, let us!"

"Do you want us to go, Theo?"

"Oh, Theo, have we tired you?"

"Have we outstayed our welcome?"

Soulful as they had been to that moment, they were as ready to giggle as the calves or puppies or colts.

"No. I really agree with all of you. Only he 's a nice healthy, normal boy, and because we 're sitting in the dark (which was my doing, I know) and because it 's midnight, — but really I suppose because we 're girls and can't help it, — we 're turning him into priests and poets and kings and —"

"And Hamlets," put in Miss Davenport.

Theo fell into silence. Her silence was an admission; said as much as all the eloquence of the three.

In that roomful of girls it had to be admitted that David was very attractive. They continued to talk of him. At the moment when at last the conversation began to flag — though only then by reason of the lateness of the hour — it was Theo who gave it a fillip.

Mrs. Tarpalin had said that he had a romantic history.

Drowsy eyes grew bright.

"Oh, Theo. And you kept it to yourself. Till now, anyway, like good wine. Why did n't you tell us?"

"Romantic!"

They looked at each other.

"How absolutely thrilling. I said his eyes were melancholy."

"What was it?"

"Mrs. Tarpalin would n't tell me."

"Would n't tell you?"

"Or could n't. I don't know. It was yesterday, you see, — the day before yesterday now. One did n't know him then."

"It can't be he himself. He 's too young for anything to have happened to him. It must be his parents, must n't it?"

"Perhaps they eloped or something."

"Why *did n't* you ask?"

"I think Mrs. Tarpalin stopped me. You know how you can stop people asking questions without saying anything. I have a sort of idea that she had let what she said slip and regretted it. Anyway, I did n't know then that it would be interesting to know."

"Could you ask now?"

"No, I could n't. No one could."

"He lives in London," Miss Blake said. "He told me so when we were dancing. Was n't it rather hard on me that I could n't dance to my own playing? Mrs. Tarpalin's a darling, but I do play dance music better than she does. I wish I lived in London. Oo, I did n't mean that. Not because, I did n't mean. I meant I did just wish I did. It must be something about his parents."

"Perhaps they did elope. That would be romantic enough, would n't it? You played divinely, Emma. He said you did. I tell you from motives of gratitude."

"That 's nice of you, Lucy. But it is n't any of us. It 's Theo."

"It is n't Theo," said Theo, "so it is n't any one."

They lit their candles.

As they were going, all having kissed Theo, one of them said, "If it only gave elopements and things in Peerages and Baronetages we could look him up."

"Oh, well, it would say something about him."

So thin the ice on which the unconscious David skated!

The other talk of him was in Mrs. Tarpalin's bedroom the other side of the house. Mrs. Tarpalin also wore a dressing-gown, but she did not look like a Lovesick Maiden or a Wise or a Foolish Virgin. She looked much more like the Mrs. Hardcastle she was to play in the coming theatricals.

"Is it possible," she said to her husband, "that he has n't been *asked* to Ettringham?"

"Yes, he seems not to have been asked."

"And is it possible that that 's because —?"

"They 've been there — his parents and the young one."

"The young one? The brother?"

Colonel Tarpalin nodded.

"He told me that at dinner. He did n't appear to attach any meaning to it. That 's the odd thing. It seemed to me as if he only mentioned it because he did n't want to do his relation an injustice."

"How do you mean?"

"She does n't cut the family."

"It 's just the family that I 'm afraid she does cut — the first family."

"It looks like that," said Colonel Tarpalin.

They looked at each other and into the fire. Mrs. Tarpalin took the tongs, and carefully, but absently also, put back some bits of coal which had fallen on to the hearth.

"Could any one be so — so narrow?" she said. "That — that perfectly charming boy. That poor boy."

"Instead of being proud of him!" said Colonel Tarpalin — irrelevantly only in a grammatical sense.

Mrs. Tarpalin said, "I can hardly believe it. Susan Cantrell was quite human — a rather generous girl. She once wrote twenty-five lines for me of fifty which were set me as a punishment for what in boys' schools is called cribbing. She put kindness then before mere correctness,

so she had sympathy for sinners. It is n't even as if this nice boy was the sinner. And what 's more, I don't believe his mother was. No boy with a face like this boy's face ever had a bad mother. Don't tell me!"

"I 'm not telling you," said her husband, smiling. "I 'm with you. No, I 'm rejoicing that you 're with me."

"Of course I 'm with you," said Mrs. Tarpalin, "and of course you 're with me. I 'm thoroughly ashamed of Susan Penstephen."

"The conventional woman's view," he reminded her.

"Then I 'm ashamed of women," said Mrs. Tarpalin.

She put down the tongs.

"Really, really," she said, "the more I think of it! The opportunity! The way people miss their chances! It 's amazing. Getting old. A widow. Her own son dead. And this boy to her hand. Goodness, the privilege of it! To have been able just to try in some degree to make up to him! She could n't ever really make up to him — no one could, but to have the power to do something, and not to use it! She does n't know him apparently — has n't seen him, I gathered. Either has n't taken the trouble to see him, or has deliberately taken the trouble not to. Well, all I can say is, she richly deserves her loss."

David's hostess, too, under the spell of him! A Lady Jane, after all, to the Maidens offering their young homage at that moment in Theo's room?

She thought for a little, and then said from her thoughts, which, apparently, she expected her husband to follow, "If she 's had the other boy there, it can't, of course, mean anything else."

Colonel Tarpalin had not, however, kept pace with her.

"Why, ignoring the first family, of course. She starts the family, as the law does, from him — the legitimate, the heir. Oh, George, that poor boy, that poor poor boy!"

In spite of her Hardcastle double chins her eyes filled with tears.

"He 'll be all right," said Colonel Tarpalin at once.

"He 's got something better than legitimacy. Are n't you proving it, dear? You, who never saw him till to-day, are crying over him."

"Crying for him, George."

She felt for her handkerchief and blew her nose.

"How his mother must love him," she said, snivelling.

"But something *is* worrying me," her husband said — as if, as she thought to herself even through her snufflings, nothing were worrying her! — "I can hardly think it, yet, from what he said, from his manner . . . Is it possible, do you think, that he himself does n't know?"

Mrs. Tarpalin stopped crying.

"They could n't *not* have told him!"

"So I should have supposed."

"They could n't have kept it from him. Why, everybody knows. It was common knowledge. They must know it at the school. Frank knew. Why, the name . . ."

"I have an idea all the same that he does n't."

"But — why, he would only have to look himself up in the book . . ."

"He may not have done that. It 's just conceivable. If he had no reason for supposing — Boys don't think of these things."

Mrs. Tarpalin looked frightened.

"I took it for granted he knew. We must ask Frank. If he does n't, I shan't have an easy moment while he's here. George, it 's ridiculous," she came back to that. "He must have been told."

But her husband did not reassure her. He could only tell her again of the vague impression which he had received.

"I have nothing to go on," he said, "beyond the boy's manner."

Mrs. Tarpalin groaned.

"Oh, dear," she said, "with the house full of girls all interested in him! Look at the way they wanted to dance with him. Even Theo, who has the pick of the young men

wherever she goes. Oh, yes, they'll be looking him up, we may be perfectly certain of that. Perfectly, perfectly certain. I know girls — what they are when they fancy themselves interested. They're probably talking about him this minute."

She got up from her chair, tying the tasselled cords of her dressing-gown.

"Where are you going?"

"To put away a few books," said Mrs. Tarpalin. "They need n't, at any rate, be lying about."

In about ten minutes she came back.

"There," she said, "all I could find — Lodge, Debrett, Burke's Landed Gentry. Is there anything else? I shall put them in my wardrobe. No, Tilson would find them there. You must make room for them in one of the cupboards in your dressing-room. You must lock them up. I hope I've remembered them all. Use n't there to be another Debrett in the smoking-room? You must look in the morning, George, in case I've missed any. These are all fairly recent ones, but anything not older than nine or ten years would matter, and there might be others knocking about somewhere in some of the rooms. Whittaker, — would there be anything in that? I don't want to run any risks. It's criminal of them if they have n't told him — though from his mother's point of view I can quite understand that they just have n't been able."

She opened one of the volumes and turned the pages.

"Penshant, Penshurst, Penstable — Penstephen. Here we are. Yes. Well, what else was possible? Here, take it. Take them away." She put the volume blindly into his arms with the others. "And I was right," she said. "Those silly girls have n't gone to bed yet. They're all still talking in Theodore's room."

CHAPTER V

FRANK TARPALIN, interrogated early the next morning, was found not to know whether David knew. He, like his mother, had taken it for granted that he did — that he must. He was considerably upset by the doubt that his father had put upon what had seemed to him a certainty.

"Good Lord!" he said; "poor chap, if he does n't!"

What could David's parents be about?

But Mrs. Tarpalin said she understood only too well what one of them was about.

"She has put off telling him. And now she does n't dare. Or she has hoped, against hope, probably, that he does know — that somebody else has told him. My heart bleeds for her. She's tried to shelter him. It's the maternal instinct. She's the unhappiest woman in England. She just does n't know what to do."

Frank and his father demurred with a But or two.

"No," she said, "it's that. I'm only guessing, but I'm guessing right. She just does n't know what to do, so she does nothing, and the years slip by."

"Well, nothing is likely to happen here," said Frank. "We shall be too busy."

"I tell your mother it is most unlikely," said Colonel Tarpalin.

But Mrs. Tarpalin shook her two chins.

"It's the unlikely that does happen," she said. "If it was n't, how could I possibly count on knowing my words?"

So, into a company, the greater part of which for one reason or another was acutely conscious of him, the unconscious David came down to breakfast.

He was in excellent spirits. All the influences of the house contributed to his well-being. He always slept well,

and had waked only when he was called. It had been pleasant from between the warm sheets to watch the footman who valeted him, preparing the way for him from slumber to the duties and pleasures of the day. The pleasures preponderated. The duties, too, would be pleasures. He looked forward to the rehearsals. Work? Work that you loved was n't work. He was full of pleasurable anticipations. To the pleasant tune of them he went to sleep again. When he woke again the day was half-an-hour older. But he had been told that the breakfast hour was as elastic as you pleased, so he did not hurry. As he bathed and dressed he whistled of sheer lightness of heart. His cold bath was not too cold for him. As he rubbed his body to a glow, the long glass must have given him an exceedingly pleasant picture of naked youth and health. This too may have helped. He began the day without a care.

He was late, but not the last. There were two vacant places at the table, at which, as they came down, the guests had seated themselves as they liked, or as chance ordained. These two places were next to each other. David, looking round and exchanging good-mornings, saw that Miss Nevern was not down yet. The other of them, then, would be for her. He was helping himself to coffee at the side-table as she came in.

She leant over Mrs. Tarpalin and kissed her, and followed Frank Tarpalin to where David stood now lifting the covers.

David had just helped himself to omelette — a fresh one had just been brought in — and as she saw it she said omelette without looking farther.

It even pleased David in his happy mood that, as they sat side by side presently, they should be eating the same thing.

It was a beautiful morning. Winter though it was — January, heart of the winter — the sunshine was so bright that a blind or two had been partly lowered to keep the light out of the eyes of those who faced it at the table.

From below these blinds the sun streamed on to the table, catching itself in silver here, in the cut-glass of a honey pot or a jam jar there, and everywhere in the gleaming damask. There had been frost in the night and a white rime was still on the bushes outside, and on the grass under the trees. David from his seat could see shining lawns.

"You ought all to spend the whole day out of doors," Mrs. Tarpalin said, "but your stage-manager is not going to let you."

"We can have till a quarter past eleven," said Frank. "Then solid work."

"Has n't he a stiff lip!" said his father. "Thank goodness, I'm not an actor."

"You ought to be playing Mr. Hardcastle," said Frank.

"No, no, I'm not young enough to play old men."

He had finished his breakfast, and drifted out of the room. Mrs. Tarpalin went off presently to interview the cook, and one by one, or in twos and threes, others who had finished drifted away also. The later ones stayed on.

David and Theo Nevern, as the last down, were presently left alone.

"I'm a very healthy young woman in the morning," Miss Nevern said. "I have n't nearly done. I want some marmalade, please, Mr. Penstephen, — unless there's any honey-in-the-comb. Oh, then I want some honey."

David also ate honey-in-the-comb. Again the intimate isolated feeling. It was delightful. David had never enjoyed a breakfast more.

When they had finished they went out into the garden, where they found some of the rest of the party throwing crumbs to the birds. Then they strolled for a few minutes in the sunshine on the polished gravel paths. Frank Tarpalin, going in, called to them to say that the rehearsal would be in the music-room.

"A quarter past eleven sharp, mind," he said; and they answered, "A quarter past, all right."

Presently, from strolling hatless in the sunshine, they were going for a walk in earnest — a short walk. Theo had got her hat and coat, and David his cap and stick. They had three quarters of an hour nearly. Exercise would be good for them before they began. There would be time to walk as far as the kennels — no, as far as the bottom of the wood by the lower road and back through the village.

Any one else coming? The girls had not their boots on. Welwyn had followed Frank into the house. The younger boys were shy, perhaps, or perhaps they were sportsmen, and felt that when Miss Nevern chose a companion, he should have the field to himself. The girls smiled at each other. They were all loyal to Theo's acknowledged supremacy. If David must go walking with one of them, they would rather it was with her than — each, of course, excepting herself — any other of their number.

But over those that were left there fell a temporary blight. David and Theo withdrawn, the interest of the passing minutes seemed gone too. Even the boys were conscious of some sort of blank; but they, more self-sufficing than the girls, almost at once found amusement in an old tennis ball, which by chance lay on the path, and which they shied in turn into the blue overhead (from which the bolts fall!) and caught or tried to catch as it returned to earth. The girls looked at their pointed shoes and at the melting rime of the grass and went back into the house. They did not talk of David as they went, but the thoughts of each of them — and each of them knew it of the other two — followed the couple on their walk.

Miss Davenport said she ought to write some letters, but made no attempt to do so.

"Oh," she said, "how I hate writing letters. I never know what to say. I wonder what time the early post goes."

The others told her.

"Oh, then I have n't much time. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Lucy Aylmer. "What are you, Emma?"

"I don't quite know."

Eventually they all gravitated to the library. They idled there by the fire, looked at the newspapers, played with one of the dogs. Emma Blake went over to a table on which an expanding bookcase held such books of reference as the London Directory, the Clergy List, the Postal Guide, the Red Book, and Army and Navy Lists, and the like.

Mrs. Tarpalin, coming in to write some menus, asked her if there was anything that she wanted.

No, Emma said, blushing, a Peerage in her hand — but a Peerage which she saw did not contain a Baronetage — no, thank dear Mrs. Tarpalin, she was only fiddling.

"The rehearsal's in the music-room," she said, "is n't it?"

As if everybody did n't know that? She went back to the smiling girls by the fire, and Mrs. Tarpalin began to write out her menus.

"Could n't we help you with them?" said Miss Davenport.

"What did I tell you?" Mrs. Tarpalin said to Colonel Tarpalin afterwards. "Was n't I right to go round last night collecting them all? Goodness, goodness, these girls! It is n't that one of them has an idea. It's only, as I said, that they're all interested. Anything about him would be food for their curiosity. It is n't malice we've got to guard against, it's admiration. How I wish the next fortnight was safely over."

The girls, as soon as their hostess was out of the room, chaffed Emma. "'No, thank you, dear Mrs. Tarpalin, I'm only fiddling!'"

"There does n't seem to be one in the room," said Miss Blake, unperturbed. "It's no good your looking at that, Lucy; it's only a Peerage."

"*I'm* only fiddling," said Miss Aylmer. "But I know I've seen one somewhere."

"What else could I have said?" asked Emma. "It's the sort of thing you can't ask for, is n't it?"

The boys had found an old tennis racquet and were playing cricket now with the ball. The girls were still idling by the cheerful library fire. Mrs. Tarpalin was snatching a look at her part, and talking to one of the housemaids at the same time. David and Miss Nevern were somewhere near the bottom of the wood; and Eric Dunstable was driving from White to Red Alban.

At a little before eleven, Frank Tarpalin, arranging the music-room for the rehearsal with the help of Welwyn, was informed that Mr. Dunstable had arrived, and went out to receive him. Mrs. Tarpalin, her book in her hand, came downstairs as they were shaking hands in the hall, and, the girls at the same moment coming out of the library and the three boys chancing to come in from the lawn, a general move was made for the music-room.

The next few minutes saw the arrival of a brake from Astonbury with such of the members of the cast as were not staying in the house, and thus, nearly a quarter of an hour before the time arranged for the rehearsal, most of the company had assembled.

It was perhaps the fault of the sun. It was a day for loitering. The bottom of the wood was a delightful spot. Theo, like Diana, was a huntress, and David very young and very comely. In the sunshine and the sharp clear air it was pleasant to add a captive to your captives; in the sunshine and the sharp clear air equally pleasant to let yourself be taken (more or less) captive by the desire of every one's eye. There was a stile dividing the path skirting the wood from the field, below which ran the lane which led to the village. Here they sat for some time talking; breaking twigs from the dry hedge; presently playing a game on the flat top of the stile with the bits of wood so

obtained. It was a game that you generally played with matches. You made a rough pyramid of the matches, and with two used as pliers, you had, turn about, to extract matches from the pile without knocking the whole thing down. The twisted, bent, crooked, knotted, curved, or even forked, nature of the bits of stick used instead of the matches, made your task more difficult. Your heads were brought very near together as you played and watched. You had to take off your gloves. Your fingers sometimes touched.

"You moved it."

"I did n't."

"How can you!"

"I'm quite certain."

"Well, I'm going to watch you very carefully. I'm not going to let you cheat. Let me see."

The brim of her hat grazed the brim of his cap. Neither stirred while the hands that had been discussed so copiously the night before in Theo's room did their delicate work amongst the little bits of stick.

He extricated a remarkably crooked fragment of twig without jeopardising the hazardous balance of the rest. The hat and the cap — touching — did not move, even then, for a moment or two. Then Miss Nevern moved, and the little spell was broken.

She was quite different, David was thinking, from what she had seemed at their first meeting. Difficult now to believe that the curious talk beside the fire in the hall had ever taken place. Her lips and teeth and eyes were laughing now; the tremulous droop of the lips that gave her face, at times, what he thought of as the Greuze look, gone. But she had not receded. On the contrary, he felt that he knew her better. And she was n't a bit less dangerous. He remembered his sudden momentary jealousy of his friend — and understood it. All that she did, all that she shewed of her different moods might, indeed, as he had suspected, be her 'way' with whichever of her admirers was with her,

but this, if it was so, seemed no longer to matter. It was himself that she had chosen for this walk. He was the favoured one of all for the time being. She had given a general invitation to the others to come, too, but she had not meant it to be accepted.

She gave a cry. She had thought the stick she was moving was clear of the rest, and a minute branching at the end of it had caught in the others. She had knocked the whole pile down.

Well, it was a game that was supposed to be played not with crooked bits of twig, but with matches (so that however you played it, perhaps, you were playing approximately with fire!), and they had both done wonders in keeping the structure, as they diminished it, standing so long.

"Game to you, though," said Miss Nevern and asked him the time.

It was twenty-five minutes past eleven, and (not that it mattered, or could have been supposed to matter) they were a mile and a half from home.

In the music-room at Red Alban the rehearsal was in progress. There was no need to wait for David or Miss Nevern. So at about half-past eleven a start was made without them. Their absence, however, at the rehearsal (at which, as amateurs, all the other members of the cast, whether or not they were likely to be wanted, thought it necessary to assist) made them duly conspicuous, and, as the company had assembled a quarter of an hour before its time, by so much the more late would they appear to be when at length they should arrive.

The girls watched Eric Dunstable and exchanged smiles. Mrs. Tarpalin, conscious of nerves, her own and other people's, felt, as she saw the sulky look deepening on his face, that she was extremely glad that Theo was late, and quite unchristianly glad to think that David, when Eric Dunstable should see what manner of person it was that the delinquent Theo had been with, would shew himself to

be of so considerable a mettle. She disliked Eric Dunstable greatly, and, though she hoped she never forgot her good manners, always found it difficult to conceal her feelings. If she had not been so worried about David she would not perhaps have been so irritated by the sulkiness of Mr. Dunstable. She knew that his sulkiness, which she still observed even after the rehearsal had begun and she was supposed to be giving her whole attention to her part, was itself an expression of irritation. But what right had he to be irritated by Theo's absence — by Theo's absence even though it should be in company with some one else? He was not engaged to Theo. At least she did not think he was. And if he had been engaged to her fifty times over that would n't have given him the right to be irritated — or if he were irritated to shew it. She looked at the big, handsome, ill-conditioned young man and felt very angry.

All the same it was rather naughty of Theo, for, though she could find it in her heart to be glad that Theo had contrived to annoy Eric, she had no intention of letting her make a fool of David.

So it came that when David and Miss Nevern appeared, half-an-hour late, but in plenty of time to take up their parts, it was quite obvious that they came into an assemblage of persons who, if they had not been talking of them, had had them very clearly in mind. The fact of this seemed to link them more closely together, so that, if it had mattered their being late, they would have felt deliciously fellow-culprits.

It chanced that there was a break in the rehearsal just as they came in. Frank, stage-managing and acting too, had sent for some notes he had made embodying business which was not in the script.

"No, heaps of time," he said in answer to their apologies, which were addressed partly to him and partly to their hostess on the stage.

Miss Nevern now saw Eric Dunstable and shook hands with him with a "Hullo, Eric," and turned back, laughing,

to David, to associate herself with his explanation of how he had underestimated distance and overestimated time.

All the girls looked at him, smiling, and Frank Tarpalin punched him affectionately in the chest, and Mrs. Tarpalin, smiling at him warmly too, — still from her place on the 'stage,' — took this moment, as if remembering, to make him and Mr. Dunstable known to each other.

She did, it is true, introduce Mr. Penstephen to Mr. Dunstable, but in such a way that she seemed to be introducing Mr. Dunstable to Mr. Penstephen.

David, advancing a little, met the eyes of his fellow-traveller, who inclined his head without otherwise moving.

Mrs. Tarpalin, a prey perhaps to her irritation, was not quite tactful when she added cordially that Mr. Penstephen was their leading man.

Theo exchanged greetings with the other newcomers, with whom she was acquainted, and to whom David was now introduced. There was a chair beside Mr. Dunstable, but she took another, and the young men from Astonbury made a place amongst them for David. A servant came back with the notes, and the interrupted rehearsal was resumed and proceeded. But the mischief was done.

Frank followed David into his room that night.

"Look here," he said, "you must n't mind him. Nobody who knows him minds him."

"It is n't that I mind him exactly," said David.

"It's his manner," Frank said, "his perfectly damnable manner. He's the same with everybody. I told you, did n't I? And my mother did too. She can't bear him. Everybody feels it."

"It was rather difficult to act with him," David said.

"I know. I could see."

Goodness, as they looked back over the events of the day, everybody had been able to see!

"He made it difficult. He seemed as if he meant to make it difficult. Why did he?"

David suddenly was asking him. For David had remembered as he spoke exactly how difficult Dunstable had made it to act with him. Hastings and Marlow were supposed to be friends. You could n't convey much idea of friendship when a person — the person you are supposed to be friends with — looked at you as if he did n't see you.

"He's like that," Frank said, in his anxiety for David. "He does n't mean it."

David shook his head.

"Not particularly — not individually, I mean. He's a swine. He can't help it. He was out of temper to-day. Something had put him out."

"He seemed put out," said David. "But it was as if I had put him out."

"If only I had n't asked him to act!" said Frank. "Good Lord, if only I had n't! I might have known!" He set his teeth. "If he can't behave himself to-morrow, I'll tell him we don't want him."

But David would not hear of that.

"It was Theo, really, you know, not you!" Frank said at last.

"Miss Nevern?"

"Who had put him out."

David looked at him quickly.

"He did mean it," Frank said. "I'm frantically ashamed of him. He meant it. He was venting things on you. But it was Theo."

CHAPTER VI

FRANK'S explanation — there was this solace for David — could not but be flattering to a vanity which yet was really very modest; but David should, perhaps, have taken warning. There was, however, Miss Nevern to reckon with, and Miss Nevern was staying in the house. If there be anything to be said for Mr. Dunstable, we may remind ourselves that perhaps this rankled — that while he, Hastings (second fiddle, anyway), was at White Alban and had to go back there, they, Young Marlow and Kate Hardcastle (first fiddles), were at Red Alban, under one roof, and free, if they were so minded, to continue their counterfeit dallyings, or change mock love-making for love-making in earnest. There *was* something to be said for the ungracious young man — the more, perhaps, by very reason of his ungraciousness — and David *should* have taken warning. What, though, about Theo?

Miss Nevern shewed herself likely to go on as she had begun. She had certainly, as her stage-manager said, spared her sullen admirer nothing at the first rehearsal. There had been David as himself when there had not been David as Young Marlow, and since the whole play had been run through — the company, as had been arranged, dining at Red Alban (in what they stood up in) to admit for that day of a complete rehearsal — there had been quite a great deal of David in both capacities.

Theo, Frank Tarpalin said to himself, was a little wretch. He now, like his mother, looked forward to the happenings of the next fortnight with apprehension. David had behaved like a brick; was a brick — a very brick of bricks; but human nature was human nature. There was a point beyond which it was not possible to endure. Would that point be passed? Theo was the person who ought to be

spoken to, but Frank Tarpalin shrank for some reason from 'speaking' to Theo. Perhaps things would be better on the morrow. A whole day's rehearsal — morning, afternoon, and evening — was rather a strain. The evening had been worst. It was in the evening that, when Marlow, by the stage-manager's direction, had laid his hand upon his friend Hastings's arm, his friend Hastings had shaken it off! There would be no more evening rehearsals for the present; no more unwieldy dinners at which Theo could take advantage, as she had done that night, of the informality of the occasion to plant herself — nobody having taken anybody else in — between David and one of the younger boys, instead of sitting beside the raging Dunstable as it was plain that she had been intended to do.

David had, indeed, spent rather a difficult day. But, howsoever unwittingly, he had been, and he knew it, a little to blame. For he was aware of Miss Nevern's power to make you jealous, and he had not been without some sort of inkling that Eric Dunstable was jealous. He had borne Dunstable's hardly veiled enmity, affecting not to perceive it, but he had taken no steps to assuage Dunstable's anger or to allay his suspicions. He would try, then, to be more judicious the next day.

Mrs. Tarpalin 'spoke' to Theo. She asked her help in settling some flowers, and, all the girls at once volunteering their services, she set the Davenport and the Aylmer and the Blake to work on those in the drawing-room, and took Theo with her up to her own sitting-room.

"These only want their stalks cut," she said, "and a little weeding-out. They were fresh yesterday. January is rather hard on flowers and Hacket is a tyrant — all good gardeners are. Theo, you're being very naughty."

"Me, dear Mrs. Tarpalin?"

"You, dear Theo, and you know it just as well as I do."

Theo was all round eyes and innocence and drooping mouth.

"Me?" she said again. "Dearest Mrs. Tarpalin!"

"You, dearest Miss Nevern. Yes, bad Theo, you. Now tell me."

"She's going to lecture me," said Miss Nevern to the chrysanthemums.

"You richly deserve that I should. Why did you want Eric Dunstable to be asked to act if you were going to behave like this to him?"

Theo took refuge in "Like what?"

"If you'll just lift the vases for me I'll spread this under them. Now we can lay everything on the newspaper. As if you did n't know, my dear."

"He should n't be such a — ruffian," said Theo, pausing for the word she wanted.

"But that's why you like him."

Theo looked at her with respect.

"How did you know?"

"My dear, I don't pretend to like him myself, but I can't pretend, either, that for one moment I can be indifferent to him or even unconscious of him when he's there. I suppose that's how I know. The more I disliked him, the more tribute I should be paying to some quality that he has."

"You do see that he has qualities."

"Very grudgingly," said Mrs. Tarpalin.

"I've got to find out somehow whether I can bear him," said Miss Nevern.

"But not through somebody else."

Miss Nevern smiled and cut some stalks, shaking the drops of water from them first, and from her fingers also, on to the newspaper.

"No, Theo, you're being abominable and I won't have it."

"He's a delightful boy."

"That's why. No, that is n't why at all. It is n't only because I like him that I won't have it. You're being

extremely naughty. Do you want them at each other's throats?"

"It would be rather exciting," said Theo. "I don't think I've ever been actually fought over."

"Well, it is to stop," said Mrs. Tarpalin. "I could n't go through another day like yesterday, and what's more, my dear, I would n't. Now, Theo, kiss me and be a good girl."

Things were really better after that. Theo was in the hall when Eric Dunstable arrived, and perhaps that helped. She said "Hullo, Eric," but quite differently from her "Hullo, Eric!" of the day before.

He said, "That you, Theo?"

We, who may guess now at Theo, may ask ourselves whether 'That' had not equally been Theo the day before. However, things were better. Let this suffice. Sufficient unto the moment, as unto the day, the evil thereof. He had arrived punctually this time — not a quarter of an hour too soon. But there was still a quarter of an hour to spare, for the proprietor of the theatre had driven over to Red Alban again upon some matter connected with the arrangements and was closeted with Frank in the library, and the rehearsal was not to begin till he was gone. The brake from Astonbury was heard on the drive, and Eric and Theo slipped out into the garden. They strolled now where she and David had strolled before they went for their unfortunate walk. This, too, may have helped. Eric Dunstable certainly started the day in better temper.

Both Frank and Mrs. Tarpalin felt reassured.

"You'd better sit next him at luncheon," Mrs. Tarpalin whispered to Theo. "It's bribery, I know, but in this case we'll call bribery reward — which in one sense it is, a merely anticipated reward."

"The result justifying the means? You don't mind sacrificing me."

"Ah, Theo dear, I know you," said Mrs. Tarpalin. "You're very well able to take care of yourself."

"I'm not at all sure that you mean that for a compliment," said Theo, but, smiling and amiable, she sat on one side of Mr. Dunstable at luncheon, and Emma Blake on the other, and the afternoon with but some trifling restiveness passed smoothly also.

David, writing to his mother that evening, was able to tell her how much he was enjoying himself. Partly because he could not have done this unreservedly the day before, he had sent her a post-card only, reporting his safe arrival. Now he wrote a full and very cheerful letter giving an account of himself and his surroundings. He dwelt most, it would perhaps be observable, upon the first and third days of his stay — told her of Red Alban with its friendly atmosphere, his delightful hosts and the welcome they had given him, the pleasant party in the house, gave some description of the girls (giving prominence, it is likely, to that one of them who stood out for him from the rest), and told of the progress made at that day's rehearsals.

"It's the jolliest house to stay in. You do exactly as you like. Nobody bothers you about anything. I am enjoying myself awfully."

He did not mention the allusions of both his host and his hostess to Ettringham, or even say that Mrs. Tarpalin had been at school with Lady Penstephen. Something uncomfortable had hung about the moments connected with those topics, and an obscure instinct may have told him to avoid them. But he gave a casual line or two to Mr. Dunstable, and saw no reason for not saying that he did not like him. "However," he wrote, dismissing the subject, "he is staying at White Alban, I'm glad to say, not Red, so as a disturbing influence he's only here part of the time, and we manage to keep the peace."

His letter reached Cheyne Walk by what was called the second post, and was actually, where posts were frequent, the third or fourth. It found her pale and left her not less

pale, when she had read it and passed it on to his father. She was getting through the days and had not shewn David's father her heart. To what use? She was not very well, and was supposed to be missing David. She had been supposed only to be missing David when she came back from her strange afternoon in Kensington Gardens. She had left the house laughing and had returned to it having wept. That was why.

"He seems to be enjoying himself," John said, when he had read the letter through.

Yes, he was undoubtedly enjoying himself, but she knew now, as well as if she had been told, how Lady Harbington's blow was destined to be struck. Her intuition gave her exact values and proportions. She was prepared, and knew almost, though not quite, what she would say to David when he came back to her with knowledge but not reproach in his eyes. It is significant of her deep understanding of him that she knew there would be no reproach. The reproaches would be, as they always had been, from herself to herself.

She wrote him a long cheerful letter in answer. There were reticences in her letter as in his, though, like all her letters to him and to his father, this one was circumstantial as a diary. Without any literary equipment she had the rare secret of the 'satisfactory' letter — the letter which tells you all you want to know, and conjures up pictures of familiar intimate things. She took up her count from the moment at which they parted; told him that she had sat — actually sat, the day was so warm — for quite a long time in Kensington Gardens after seeing him off. There had been a very beautiful sunset with that sort of rays which, from association with foreign picture galleries, they both knew as 'Annunciations.' She hoped he had seen it from the train. She had gone back to Cheyne Walk then, taking a hansom in Kensington Gore, and had found tea just coming in — that sort of letter. She commented on all that he told her, rallied him on his obvious admiration

of his Kate Hardcastle, and only at the end touched on what she knew to be vital (though he did not) in his letter to her.

Let him, in the case of the one member of the company with whom he found it difficult to get on, avoid friction as far as possible. She had no experience of theatricals, but could conceive that the conditions made for little irritations. Peace was so fragile a thing. There had to be give and take. "Give good, David, and take evil gently." She was preaching him the gospel of the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

So she wrote to him hopefully, but in her heart she had no hope. For to her, whom life had struck at so relentlessly, it was not and could not be for nothing that the one person who was not friendly to him should 'chance' to be staying at White Alban. Useless then to write this? Useless. Yet on the off chance, as it were, of averting catastrophe she wrote it, and vowed to herself and to the powers that be that if he should be returned to her unenlightened, if for once fate sparing him should spare her, she would face uncertainties no longer, but lay his case and hers frankly and fully before him.

Thus she was able to preserve not only her counsel, and go on seeming only to be missing him, but her sanity also. Thus she worked off some of her misery and felt better. To his postscript, "I hope you still think of coming down," she made no answer.

David, when her letter reached him, was a little puzzled by her exhortations — the more so that the day and a half that had elapsed, between the writing of his own letter and the arrival of her reply to it, had produced conditions which gave what she said an added point. The Hastings of the cast had become increasingly hostile to the Marlow, the Eric Dunstable of the meals and the intervals generally, to the David Penstephen. It was as if his mother divined that there might be a real hostility. And there seemed to be now a hostility which was very real, indeed. It dis-

tressed David more almost than it angered him. But there were times when it angered him too. How did his mother know, or what had made her think that this might happen?

He looked at Dunstable sometimes and wondered what went on behind the unfriendly face. He knew that Dunstable's conduct was reacting upon Miss Nevern. Miss Nevern, he could not fail to see, had turned once more to him, David; and Dunstable was jealous. It was now, perhaps, — though it was not David who thought this, — that Theo began to be deliberately mischievous. . . .

Everybody was conscious of the overcharged state of the atmosphere. An explosion seemed imminent. The girls were all watching; the boys even; the Astonbury contingent. There were no factions, for every one was on David's side.

The girls said to each other, "Mr. Dunstable really *is!*" — hating him, yet because they hated him, secretly attracted too — and therein, perhaps, throwing some sort of light for us, howsoever dim it might be, upon Theo and her attitude. The boys kept out of his way, and laughed at him as much as they dared. They moved away sometimes when he came near them.

The young men from Astonbury spoke to him as little as possible, and spoke of him as Offensive: A Poisonous Feller.

Mr. Dunstable in short was not popular, and David, who had begun by incurring his displeasure, was; and Theo Nevern, who had started the whole thing by her thoughtlessness, — or perhaps not by anything of the sort, — was being increasingly provoking.

"Theo!" Mrs. Tarpalin said.

"I know," said Theo.

"Then, *Theo!*" said Mrs. Tarpalin sharply.

But Theo was out of hand.

"I've a good mind to put off the performance altogether," said Mrs. Tarpalin.

And then Theo surprised her by saying plaintively that she half wished she would.

Mrs. Tarpalin said no more then, but later she exchanged exasperated looks with her son.

"I shall have to speak to Eric," she said.

"Shall I speak to him?" said Frank. "Shall I just tell him this can't go on? Why should it go on? I could get another Hastings. Merton could play Hastings, and I could get some one else for Diggory. Why on earth should we put up with Eric?"

Mrs. Tarpalin did not answer this. "I've threatened Theo," she said, "that we'll give up these theatricals once for all if she goes on making trouble."

"Oh, you could n't do that," said Frank quickly. "Half the seats are sold. You absolutely could n't. Think of old Harrowby. Besides, there's the Hospital. Besides, we're jolly well not going to give up anything just on Eric's account."

"It *is* Theo, you know," Mrs. Tarpalin said. "I have spoken to her twice."

"I know," said Frank. "What the dickens she's up to! It certainly is n't Penstephen's fault."

"No, indeed it is n't," said Mrs. Tarpalin warmly. "I'm full of admiration for him. I think his forbearance is perfectly wonderful."

"Well, shall I speak to Eric?"

"No, no; that would n't do. That would mean a row at once, and it's just a row that I want to avoid. If anybody does, I will. I'd better, I suppose. I think I will."

But she did not.

And David knew that they were all watching. The rehearsals were now a strain upon his nerves. If his brief acquaintance with Miss Nevern had not enabled him to understand something of the reason for the grudge which Dunstable bore him, he must, he thought, have given up his part. This, on the one hand, and the knowledge that

the sympathies of the company were with him, on the other, combined — opposed reasons as in a sense they were! — to sustain him.

That night, after a particularly trying day, both Colonel and Mrs. Tarpalin took him aside to thank him for what each of them called his perfectly splendid performance, but what he knew, with a flush of gratitude for both in turn, meant something else. They knew that he was trying to keep the peace. They wanted him to know that they knew, and that they appreciated his efforts.

"I don't know what we should do without you," Colonel Tarpalin said.

"And you've anything but an easy part," was Mrs. Tarpalin's comment.

"I like that boy more and more," Mrs. Tarpalin said to Frank, and Frank told David.

Somehow, David said to himself before he fell asleep, somehow, — however difficult it should prove, — just somehow, he would contrive to carry the fragile thing called peace through to the end.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day there was no rehearsal. Frank Tarpalin had said that his company must have exercise and air. His company, nothing loth, had agreed that it must have exercise and air. Mrs. Tarpalin said that she for her part had said so all along.

So they all spent a delightful day of idleness, and even put the play out of their minds. Eric Dunstable was connected with the play, and they certainly all wanted to put him out of their minds. Extraordinary the difference his absence made! Mrs. Tarpalin went about the house humming *In the Gloaming* (a survival), or *The Miller and the Maid*, or *For Ever and For Ever*. A weight seemed to be lifted from every one's mind. The boys 'ragged' (as we should say now) on the lawn. The girls put on their boots early and ragged with them. The ragging turned into a game of rounders in which even Colonel Tarpalin joined. Theo became normal at once — if Theo could be said ever to be quite normal — and devoted herself to her host.

"Goodness, what children," Mrs. Tarpalin said.

She had come out from her hummings to know what they all wanted to do. There had been talk at breakfast, but nothing settled. She stood on the path, her laces fluttering, and shaded the sun from her eyes with one of her small fat hands.

"Now, attend to me, please. I've my housekeeping to think of and I must know what to order. Is it to be the big waggonette and a picnic luncheon, or Shrewsbury by train and luncheon at the *William and Mary*, or what? I want to shew Mr. Penstephen something of the country. He has n't been here before and he must n't go back to London and say that we shewed him nothing. Now, tell me. No, put it to the vote."

The big waggonette carried the day.

"Very well, we'll start in about an hour. Will that suit you all? Half-past eleven, then. And, like dear people, be ready. No, indeed, I won't play rounders!"

She went back to the house humming again.

The day was a holiday, nothing less; but a holiday not from work, but from a person.

Colonel Tarpalin with Theo beside him drove the waggonette, and Frank the supplementary dog-cart. It was Mrs. Tarpalin who suggested that her husband should drive, perhaps because she knew that he would then invite Theo to the box seat. David she placed next to herself. But she had not, indeed, any fear of Theo that day. Everybody was going to be good.

David experienced again the sense of well-being that had marked the day of his arrival. He had, once more, not a care in the world. Just occasionally the thought of Dunstable came to remind him that the respite of the pleasant hours was but temporary — a marking of time — but his spirits were too buoyant to be greatly affected by this. Every moment took him farther, he knew, from White Alban, where the disturber of his peace might be thought of as anchored for that day at least. Nothing, then, marred the hours.

In later years, when David looked back, this picnic in the hills stood out from more important events. It always seemed to him to mark the end of his boyhood. On the other side of it were quite a number of things, connected or disconnected, which never entirely came over to this side of it — things as connected, say, as books and pictures and plays, and as disconnected as a certain sort of matchbox sold then in the streets, and the songs which Mrs. Tarpalin had sung and did hum. Actually, of course, the line was not so arbitrary. People continued to read Ouida, to

admire "Little Mrs. Gamp," and to be satisfied with what were known as Pally Roy'l farces for many years after Mrs. Tarpalin's picnic; the elastic-flapped box of wax matches continued to be sold and bought, and there were singers for songs addressed to Darlings — Oh, my darling! — and concerned with hearts Crushed with Longing, or Cursed with Thoughts; or songs telling of Silver Rivers and Storms of Fate: or, very pleasantly, of Millers and Maids. But the fashion of these, with the photographs of the Professional Beauties of then (and now), and Bishops (of then), and Actresses (of then), in the shop windows, belonged to David's boyhood; and if he would have us believe that on a particular day a clean sweep was made of the pictures of the nuns with raised eyes, and ladies beside tea-tables, or ladies in snow-storms, it is only that these at some time or other undoubtedly did give place to others, and that these are sacred to the days before the picnic, when he was still a schoolboy and gave them his ardent worship.

Yes, when David looked back. . . .

No motors then, no tubes or taxis; no telephones; no aeroplanes or submarines — and no apparent need for any one of these or of many other of Time's many inventions. And, for David, hardly anybody dead. Did nobody die when you and the world were younger? Only people like Sir Joseph and his son, it seemed; people whom you did n't know, or did n't know well; very few people according to David — very few that you cared for.

Wonderful days, the days of the years before Mrs. Tarpalin's picnic in the hills. All the people who mattered were alive then — and for many years after: Nelly Farren, Darwin, Robert Louis Stevenson.

David's heart often ached when he looked back.

And the picnic which made the dividing line? Nothing particular about this picnic — nothing much, perhaps, in the way of a picnic — nothing happened at it, anyway, to mark it from any other. A hostess to amuse her guests

takes them up a hill to eat their mid-day meal out of doors and admire the view. If we picture them rightly we shall see them as a Punch drawing by du Maurier, in the garments of the early eighties, with David (for his good looks) and Theo (for hers) easily recognisable. Colonel Tarpalin, Mrs. Tarpalin, Frank, Welwyn, the boys — we may see them all as du Mauriers.

The luncheon was excellent. Mrs. Tarpalin, who had so often to arrange shooting luncheons, understood exactly what you liked to eat out of doors: what you liked hot and what you liked cold; what you liked to drink, were you man, matron, or maid; and nothing was forgotten.

David wished his mother could see the view over which his eyes ranged.

"Yes, Shropshire where you're looking," Frank told him as he put his questions. "Now, turn. Wales. What, never been to Wales? This must be seen to, my son."

David would have liked to dip down into the rich valley then and there.

"We'll do a walking tour, you and I, some day, shall we?"

"You may safely promise, Mr. Penstephen," Mrs. Tarpalin said to him — "if Frank's in it, it will not be a walking tour."

"Well, a driving tour," said Frank. "By Jove, we will. Dolgelly, Barmouth — there's a road for you! You'll find it difficult to beat with all your travelling! Yes, and before that the country up in the hills by Dinas Mawddy, or by Machynlleth. By Jove, David Penstephen, we will."

"We will," said David, smiling.

"Isn't it horrid to hear them arranging what they're going to do?" said Emma Blake to Lucy Aylmer. "Why can't we go walking tours or driving tours!"

"We will," said Theo. "Why should n't we?"

So they chattered happily. A marking of time!

After luncheon the party broke up in twos and threes.

Frank Tarpalin and Theo, David and Lucy Aylmer, went together for a walk; the other young people disposed of themselves in one way or another, and Colonel and Mrs. Tarpalin seized the opportunity of calling on some acquaintances in the neighbourhood, with whom they exchanged visits about once a year. At four o'clock the party reassembled and drove home, stopping for tea, on the way, at an inn where, by the forethought of their hostess as they passed it that morning, the meal had been ordered to await them. Nothing happened at tea. What should happen? There were cakes and there was home-made bread, the sort of bread that you cannot get now for money, and that you can get very seldom for love. There were home-made jams. Nothing happened that evening, when they danced and when the girls of the party all fell in love with David once more for his dancing. Nothing happened the next day — which was Sunday. There was church; there was Sunday beef; there were walks; there was music in the evening. Mrs. Tarpalin played Mendelssohn — some of the Songs without Words; Emma Blake, Chopin — Nocturnes, a Prelude or two. Lucy Aylmer sang *Absent yet Present* (with perfect modesty), and Welwyn *The Midshipmite*, and, pressed for something with a chorus, *We'll all go a-hunting to-day*.

David denied that he sang. But he had sung at Glee Club concerts at school, and Frank Tarpalin was there to give him away. He sang *Way down upon the Suwanee River*, and the chorus was taken up by the rest — Mrs. Tarpalin singing out of tune under the impression that she was singing second. Then he gave *Wrap me up in my old Stable Jacket*, and Theo Nevern looked at him.

> "*Wrap me up in my old stable jacket*
> *And say a poor buffer lies low, lies low,*
> *And six stalwart lancers shall carry me*
> *With steps solemn, silent, and slow.*"

To think of the young singer lying low gave you a delicious stab at your heart. It must be you only who min-

istered to him. You must be the one to hold the cup to the clean young lips, to lay a cool hand on the burning forehead and smooth the hair back — with such tenderness as you knew that you alone had it in you to apply. It must be you who bent over him, straining to catch the failing words; you, when the young spirit fled, who closed the fading eyes. . . .

You also wanted to be one of the six stalwart lancers who carried him. . . .

And you wanted to love them too for loving him. . . .

Mrs. Tarpalin, pleasantly moved, herself, in a middle-aged way, was not certain that, when Theo for two whole days had been so good, it had been wise to press the already sufficiently disturbing David to sing. The evening of the second day of respite closed on a dangerous note of sentiment.

Theo Nevern was really rather unaccountable. For Eric Dunstable, who was the blind agent of fate, there is less need to account. We may suppose him in his ungracious way to be indeed suffering acutely, and be sorry for him if we can. Theo could make you jealous we know, and Theo had made him desperately jealous. He had nothing else against David when he met him, it is certain. We may doubt whether he was conscious of David in the railway carriage. He was a selfish traveller, that is all. David's dislike of him then had been instinctive, perhaps even in a measure prophetic. He knew nothing of David till the day of the picnic, when, at a loose end at White Alban, he went out for a drive with his aunt, Lady Harbington, and the carriage took Astonbury on its way home.

It chanced that the bills announcing the coming theatricals were out that day, and as they passed the theatre they saw them. Now, Mr. Dunstable was never ill-tempered with his great relation, but Lady Harbington, during this drive, was finding some little difficulty in entertaining him. She had left Miss Dunstable, her companion and dis-

tant connection, at home that day, because she knew that Miss Dunstable (who was certainly very tiresome) bored him. Miss Dunstable, whom we may remember as having been with her at Brussels and Homburg, was his connection also, but he allowed himself to shew occasional ill-temper to her.

Lady Harbington had not changed very materially in the nine or ten years which had turned David from a little boy into a young man. She was a little more rouged, perhaps, than formerly, but was not very perceptibly older. Allowing for alterations in the fashions we see her in much the same sort of clothes. She still wore cuffs, for instance, fastened with large jet solitaires on which there was a device in diamonds. She wore the same heavy bracelets and brooches. She did not (in the summer) wear primrose-coloured gloves or carry quite the same sort of parasol, but she had never got beyond shining kid as a covering for her hands, and when she used a parasol she carried it in a way peculiar to the day when parasols had the long silk fringes of the sixties and seventies.

"Oh, there," she said, hoping to interest her rather difficult nephew, "is the notice of your performance. Would you like to stop and look at it?"

Mr. Dunstable did not particularly want to stop, but his aunt had called to the footman and given her direction. There was a bill on one of the pillars of the portico. Lady Harbington and her nephew could read this from the carriage. It announced that on the evening of the 19th January, under the Distinguished Patronage of a list of names which included that of the august lady who now read it, there would be given a Performance of Oliver Goldsmith's Comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*, in aid of the funds of the Astonbury Hospital. The Following Ladies and Gentlemen were kindly giving their Services.

Lady Harbington, reading half aloud, paused at David's name.

"Penstephen," she said.

"He plays Young Marlow," said her nephew.

"I wonder what Penstephen," she said, thoughtfully, but also rather absently.

"I don't know. A school-fellow of Frank Tarpalin's. He played the part in the school theatricals. A son of Sir Somebody Penstephen, I believe."

"The Ettringham Penstephens, then. I don't know that there are any others. Really. A son of John Penstephen, the present man."

"Yes, that's it. Sir John Penstephen. I forget who said so."

"Really. A son of John Penstephen. There were two children, I think, and one of them was a boy. Yes, a boy and a girl, I fancy. Really! A son of John Penstephen!"

"Do you know him?"

"I know all about him," said Lady Harbington, and said no more just then.

But presently she was pouring out her story, and, for the duration at least of the rest of the drive, she found no difficulty in entertaining her difficult nephew.

"The manager quite saw," she said. "I was very firm. I knew Joseph Penstephen's father, you see, this man's uncle, and the whole circumstances — though for that matter it was an open scandal and everybody knew. They had, of course, to live abroad."

"And they went?"

"At once," said Lady Harbington.

"And that was n't all," she added, and proceeded to tell him of the rescue of Katinka.

"The father behaved altogether properly and was very grateful to me, poor man, for telling him. Such a dangerous influence for a young girl. I dare say she would never have got over it. I was not, I may say, so pleased with the girl herself."

Her nephew's eyebrows questioned, perhaps.

"Oh, she had attached herself to the children and indeed to the children's mother too, who I dare say had got

round her. She, the — er — the children's mother, was not, I am bound to say, the sort of woman — to look at — that you'd quite expect. She was a quiet-looking person — rather well-bred in appearance — and not, I believe, badly born. But that, as I said to Harriet Dunstable, only made it so much the worse. It was one of those distressing cases which oblige one to take a firm stand."

"And this is the son."

"Yes, the natural son. There was another, I think, born after they married. Oh, yes, they married eventually. You see the cousin died and John succeeded, so I suppose they thought it time to gather up what shreds of respectability were left to them, and make at least a show of decency by putting things right in the sight of the law."

"What people!" was Eric Dunstable's comment, and it must be conceded that the case for David's family, as it was put by the great lady who sat so complacently in judgment upon it, did not make for admiration.

That was all, just then.

But Eric Dunstable began to think, and Eric Dunstable was already very sore.

He heard his aunt telling her companion when she got home, and Miss Dunstable, tumbling over herself to show exactly the right sort of sympathetic interest, making her inept exclamations and remarks.

"Down here!" Miss Dunstable said. "Down here! You don't say so!"

"I am saying so. I'm telling you."

"I know, dear, but Astonbury, and acting in these very theatricals!"

"Well, why not?"

"But with you as one of the patronesses."

Miss Dunstable seemed to think Lady Harbington's sacred name profaned.

"Well, my goodness, Harriet, the wretched young man's done nothing."

"No, dear, I know, but I think you ought to have been told. You might n't have quite liked it. I don't think it was quite right of Mrs. Tarpalin. Of course, as you say, one would n't condemn the poor young man; but with such a history —"

Miss Dunstable, who was much more than ten years older than when we caught our last glimpse of her at Homburg, was like a dog with a bone.

Lady Harbington said, "Stuff!" — and went up to her room to the hands of her two maids, and Miss Dunstable took her bone to Eric.

"Your aunt is almost too charitable," she said. "She's so unfailingly kind, is n't she! But these people defied opinion. You can't do that with impunity, and the innocent have always to suffer for the guilty. I can't think it quite right of Mrs. Tarpalin, though your aunt *is* her husband's tenant."

Eric Dunstable, almost as unceremoniously as Lady Harbington herself, said, "Rot!" — the masculine equivalent, perhaps, for her more elegant "Stuff."

But Miss Dunstable, who was accustomed to being snubbed, was, to all intents and purposes, impervious to snubbings. She worried away at her bone, and in the end succeeded in detaching something from its apparent bareness.

"What I chiefly feel is that it is n't fair on the others. Theatricals are what I call such intimate things. One really wonders whether they quite know."

"What do you mean?" asked Eric.

"Well, people are so much thrown together in theatricals — meeting every day for rehearsals and all that, and even having to make love to each other, though I believe, of course, that on the stage itself they don't really — well, really kiss. Still, even to pretend to. And if there were any entanglements, how dreadful it would be — the young man so — so out of the question! I really do think —"

Eric Dunstable was angry enough to be able to snub still.

"What absolute nonsense!" he said. "Why, he's a boy. Has n't left school yet. A mere schoolboy."

"He must be growing up," said Miss Dunstable. "And if he's old enough to act . . . "

"What girls *are* acting?" she asked presently.

"Oh, *I* don't know," said Eric.

"There's Theodore Nevern, anyway," said the persistent old woman.

But this she said to the back of his head, for he had lunged away from her and was making for the empty library.

He might be angry with his tiresome relation, but what she had said, coming, as it did, on top of what he had just learnt, did most furiously give him to think! So this was who (and what) the Young Marlow that they were all making so much of at Red Alban turned out to be! It was with this nameless offspring of a shameful and shameless intrigue that Theo Nevern made counterfeit love in the traffic of the stage; went for walks that kept her late for rehearsal; spent, he was sure of it, most of her time!

His anger underwent a change. He had been angry with David before, but only as he might have been angry with any one else in whom she chose to show an interest. Now however, a new element had entered into his wrath which not only changed it, but caused it to boil up afresh. He was the vehicle of a righteous, a justified anger. He saw David now as an undesirable — some one whom Theo ought to avoid, with whom she ought not to be thrown into contact, and, above all, he saw him as one who ought not to presume to approach her.

His aunt came into the room, and — exactly as Emma Blake had done at Red Alban — took a book from a table. But she, unlike Miss Blake, was to find what she wanted. He heard her turning over the pages.

"Yes, here it is," she said; "just as I thought."

She took the volume across to him and bent over him as he read.

"Yes, born the year after we heard of them at Homburg — quite a young child, you see. Not a word of this David that you speak of. They were only married the year Sir Joseph died."

"I wonder if Mrs. Tarpalin knows."

"Oh, of course she knows. They're well-known people, the Penstephens. Every one knew at the time."

"I wonder if he knows."

"Colonel Tarpalin?"

"No; I meant the chap himself — this David Penstephen."

Lady Harbington gave a little laugh and settled her striped linen cuffs.

"My dear, *of course* he knows," she said.

And that, like the gentle looks and the good-breeding of David's mother, which had been held to make her conduct but so much the more reprehensible, did very naturally make the case and conduct of David — whom Eric's cousin, all ignorant of what he concealed, actually met upon equal terms! — more outrageous, more flagrant, still.

"He holds up his head," Eric Dunstable thought — "has the damned cheek to hold up his head!"

This David certainly did, and — if, on our knowledge of him, we may now venture to predict — always would do.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE more one thinks of it . . ." said Eric Dunstable to himself that night, and "The more one thinks of it . . ." he said to himself when he woke in the morning.

The long dull Sunday at White Alban did not help to stop his thinking or to soothe him. All day his thoughts strayed to Red Alban where Theo was, and where this David Penstephen, as he called himself, was too. It was monstrous; a scandalous thing; intolerable that the fellow should go about unlabelled. When he thought of Theo exposed to his nearness, he set his teeth. Harriet Dunstable, who was an old fool and whom he had never known to be right about anything, was right for once in her life. The more, yes, the more one thought of it. . . .

He came back and came back to a phrase the very incompleteness of which made its adequacy.

He went to church in Astonbury with his aunt and her companion, and, going and coming, heard what more they had to tell him of the Penstephen scandal, as, with retentive memories, they were able to recall it. He may have been a little disappointed to hear that there had never existed any obstacle to the marriage of David's parents. That shattered his first conception of their alliance as a vulgar intrigue. But as his aunt or old Harriet pointed out, Atheism was so much more dreadful than any other plea or motive could possibly have been.

"Are they Atheists?"

"I don't know whether they called themselves that. All I know is that John Penstephen in his writings — which I need n't say I never read — denied the authority of Holy Scripture, of Divine Revelation generally. I remember one phrase which I did read, and which he took, most inconsistently as I thought, from the Bible itself to justify the

course he was taking. 'Male and female created He them.' He actually quoted that in what I should call his defence! Just as if it was n't *because* we are males and females that the holy ordinance of marriage *was* instituted."

"It was all disgraceful," contributed Miss Dunstable.

"And they had to *live* abroad."

"Naturally, nobody could know them."

"And if it was conviction, why did they marry eventually?"

That was what poor Mary, calm now, waiting for the blow to fall, had never ceased to ask herself. Yet, since marriage had been a concession to her own weakness, she knew only too well why they had married. Lady Harbington summed up the case against her unanswerably.

"Shall you go?" asked Miss Dunstable now.

"Go? Go where?"

"To these theatricals?"

"Why not, pray?"

"I thought perhaps you would feel it looked like countenancing —"

There was the silence that shewed that Miss Dunstable, after being fairly sensible, had said something silly.

To the persons at Red Alban who were directly or indirectly concerned in the fortunes of David, the break which had come as a relief in the rehearsals was all too short. More than ever Frank Tarpalin regretted having asked Eric Dunstable to act. It was insufferable that David should be subjected to annoyance; insufferable — David apart — that what had been designed as an amusement should be turned into a penance. He was very loth to have what he called a row with any one of his company, but by Monday morning he had quite made up his mind that if Dunstable gave them any more of his nonsense, Dunstable should go. He knew exactly whose the fault was, but, even to spare Theo, he could not allow the tension, of which every one was so painfully conscious, to continue. He did

not speak of his determination to his mother, who, he knew, would have tried to dissuade him from taking action, but it certainly enabled him to face the difficulties that were possibly in store for him.

Mrs. Tarpalin, upon her part, had, though he did not know it, come to a like decision. She had decided that on the least provocation she would herself speak to Eric. She did not share her son's intention of telling him to go. She meant to take him aside and 'have it out with him.' It was clearly useless to speak to the privileged Theo. Mrs. Tarpalin thought she could be trusted to manage Eric Dunstable (much as she disliked him), and, on this assumption only, felt able, like the exercised Frank, to face the new day.

David woke on that morning with the feelings of a boy who has enjoyed an *exeat* and has to go back to school. He was really suffering very considerably by reason of the unpleasant Dunstable's animosity. If his conscience had been quite clear as to his own share in what he believed to have caused it, he would, he thought, have spoken, himself, to his enemy. It would have been quite easy to ask what he had done, if he had done nothing. A few reasonable words to him could not have failed to ease the situation which his hostility had brought about. But there was Miss Nevern, and David knew only too well what his offence was. He had certainly had no intention to offend; but he had done so, and he understood not only the nature of the offence he had given, but the nature of the feelings it had aroused.

He could not, then, make any appeal to Dunstable for the truce during rehearsals which would have been so unspeakable a boon, not to himself alone, but to every one else.

As he dressed he foresaw the renewal of the strain under which his nerves had laboured, and he did not look forward to the hours that were before him without some misgiving.

Miss Nevern joined him on the stairs as he went down to breakfast. She had some violets tucked into her belt, and

she looked as fresh as the sparkling morning, and as gentle as the flowers she wore. As he had wondered what went on behind the sullen face of Eric Dunstable, so now, as he saw her, he wondered suddenly what she really thought and felt about everything — about anything? He looked back with increasing wonder to the curious nature of their first meeting. Never since then had their relations with each other touched even the fringe of the same intimacy. He could perhaps in his heart be glad that they had not done so, but he was nevertheless perplexed. All he knew was that the influence of Dunstable, who was then but a name to him, had yet been over the strange moments, making them more strange, and in some odd way foreshadowing the days that were to follow. With the recollection of his first impressions of her, he looked at Miss Nevern now. He, it was probable, was an open book to her, but she to him was secret, veiled, inscrutable. What went on behind the soft, shining eyes?

But Theo Nevern was destined to remain a mystery to David. For him she was to be Woman, the Eternal Mystery. Afterwards he was never able to determine what motives had inspired her actions, or even whether she had consciously had any motives for some of them. Was she friend or foe? Did she or did she not care for Eric Dunstable? Had she or had she not a plan? Was her way with him, David, calculated with regard to Dunstable?

As if to silence the questions he did not ask, she took some of the violets from her belt and gave them to him.

He took her offering, nothing doubting.

So, in an atmosphere once more charged with electricity, the company assembled to the first rehearsal of the new week.

David wore Theo's violets — a dozen of them, perhaps, — thrust, unfastened, their stalks hanging, into his buttonhole. Theo wore their brothers and sisters — a couple

of score, maybe, with a few leaves — at her waist. A divided bunch of violets — so small a thing to have so disturbing a power! It may be said that Eric when he arrived saw nothing else; or that what else and whom else he saw — from the music-room itself, with its furniture, to Theo, David, Mrs. Tarpalin, Frank, and the other actors — he saw only in the light of that broken bunch. There were two bunches; there was one bunch. When he looked (without looking) from David to Theo, his eye ran along a violet thread looping from the one to the other. When he looked (in the same way) from Theo to David, the patch of colour which he had left at her waist reappeared glowing over David's left breast. The two were thus isolated for him, always, from the others, and, wherever they were, close or even apart, linked, bound, entwined. In thought he could not get away from the empurpled strands. As the two wearers moved they were everywhere, crossing you this way and that, like floating cobwebs on a summer's evening, in the flimsy nothingnesses of which you entangle yourself as you walk. Or the purple patches — red was mingled with the blue for him — flashed messages by purple rays as from purple lamps, or sent or received them by invisible wires. . . .

The rehearsal proceeded. Now Marlow and Hastings, the friends, were together on the stage; now Marlow and Kate, the lovers. Every time the separated violets came near to each other, every time Marlow and Kate touched, the wretched Eric could have cried out.

Again every one was watching.

"He can hardly hold himself," Lucy Aylmer whispered to Emma Blake.

"You know, there'll be a row," one of the Astonbury men said to Tony Lumpkin.

Frank Tarpalin's pencil tapped the script restlessly. Nothing had happened that he could 'take hold of.' He tapped the script unconsciously, but as one who ticks off seconds.

Mrs. Tarpalin sighed from time to time. Her foot moved much in the same way as the stage-manager's pencil. Now and then she changed her position. A little rustling sound came from her as her foot tapped a footstool. Her face showed no strain — only her occasional sighs and the little movements spoke to her uneasiness. Frank spun out a scene between Hastings and Miss Neville, when it came. Safety for the moment was reached there. Only the second pair of lovers were on the stage. Respite — if Theo, who was unconsciousness itself, should not chance to join David in the audience. . . .

But she did join him.

Now, if there was a thing that David, as a sensitive, thoughtful, and understanding actor, never did do, it was to talk while his fellow-actors were acting. Nothing so disturbing to the player at his work as the sound (and the sight) of conversation in progress amongst those near enough to come within the range of his consciousness. In the theatre, it is true, there can seldom be silence. Lucky at rehearsals if there be not hammerings, or at least the muffled shaking thuds of distant hammerings! There is always a murmur. But the stage is separated as by a gulf from the auditorium, and your fellow-artists, who are probably seated behind you or on one side of you, are not, as in even so large a room as the music-room at Red Alban, just under your nose.

It was Theo who talked — actually, so far as Eric Dunstable was concerned, it was probably the violets! David did no more than answer. He was watching the scene — appreciating, indeed, if Dunstable could have known it, Dunstable's easy handling of it, for the disagreeable young man was a very clever and even agreeable actor. There was the most subdued whisper of voices. Frank Tarpalin became conscious of it through the Hastings on the stage before he noted it with his ears of a stage-manager.

Hastings's hands were moving as Frank Tarpalin's pencil had been moving; as Mrs. Tarpalin's foot had moved.

His body as he stood by Miss Neville had something of rigidity. The ease of his carriage was gone.

"Take that a little quicker, Miss Neville, and come a little more forward. No, that's too much. There, yes, that's it exactly. Now, again, if you don't mind."

Frank Tarpalin looked round as he spoke, the script and pencil in his hand. Theo Nevern, in quite a harmless matter-of-fact way, was tidying-up the violets in David's buttonhole; collecting their straggling stalks together and fastening them with a pin.

"Is n't that better?" he heard her say; and he heard David say, "Yes, much better, probably. Thank you."

Hastings on the stage did not look in their direction. He held himself stiffly and gave the cue once more. But to him, above the subdued murmur, the violets seemed to be shouting. A moment and the whole room would be shouting. What would it be exactly that would precipitate the commotion? He even asked himself this, conscious of what was dangerous in himself.

Mrs. Tarpalin's foot began to move again. She cleared her throat and shifted her position. Frank's pencil began to tap. The others as before — all except, apparently, Theo and David — became conscious of menace.

Miss Neville spoke her speech again. Hastings should have answered.

Theo said something to David.

David answered with a whispered monosyllable.

Theo whispered again.

David shook his head or nodded.

Theo gave a little laugh — aloud. It fell on a dead silence.

This silence, tense as the silence after lightning, while you wait, your breath held, perhaps, for the thunder that will crash about your ears and deafen you, lasted for a moment.

Mrs. Tarpalin gave a little gasp. Frank moved forward a step or two. Eric Dunstable, his face livid, had stepped

to the front of the space which was marked off from the rest of the room as the stage.

"It's impossible," he said, hardly able to articulate. "Impossible! One can't —" He looked at Frank. "It's — it's absolutely impossible — a bit too much." He looked at David. "Can't you stop talking? You," he said, "I mean you, Mr." — he paused and looked steadily — "whatever you call yourself."

David was on his feet.

"My name's Penstephen," he said quietly, "if you're speaking to me."

"Is it!"

There was a deadly silence for a moment, in which some meaning that he seemed to have, and that was not clear to David, wrung a cry from Mrs. Tarpalin, and jerked a "Good God!" out of Frank, who then sprang to him, clutching him by the arm, shaking him.

"For God's sake, man," David, through the blood drumming in his ears, heard him say huskily, "for God's sake, remember yourself!"

But Eric for the time being had lost all control of himself, and, through the Babel of voices that now rose, David to his bewilderment heard him answer, as he shook off Frank's arm, "I know what I'm saying. I know what I'm saying. And you know too. As much right —"

Frank's hand was over his mouth.

What was it he was trying to prevent being said? What was it that had been said? David's head was swimming. Everybody seemed to be speaking. Theo, very white but her eyes shining, was saying, "Besides, it was I who was talking, not Mr. Penstephen. And I've absolutely done with you, Eric. You're making an exhibition of yourself. I'm ashamed of you."

She, too, seemed to have said something with a meaning for such as should understand. She was trembling and turned to where David had been standing. But David was not there.

David was saying to Frank, "Get them away, will you, or let us go out. I must speak to Mr. Dunstable alone."

"I'm ready," Dunstable said to David, breathing hard.

"Shall we go, then?" said David.

But Mrs. Tarpalin had recovered herself.

"No," she said, very quietly, "I won't have that."

The girls, rather huddled together, — except Theo, who stood apart, — were listening apprehensively.

Theo moved suddenly, and, eluding the others who stretched out their hands to her, slipped from the room; but not before she had given David a long clear look in which many things seemed to be struggling for expression. The boys and the young men from Astonbury were waiting, ready to do anything that might be required of them.

Mrs. Tarpalin addressed all these comprehensively. "Will you wait for us here for a few minutes. Eric, will you come with me, and Frank, and Mr. Penstephen." She led the way from the room. She shut the door when they had passed out, and said to Eric and Frank, "Will you go to the library."

She watched them go, standing quite still, her hand detaining David till they had crossed the hall and the library had received them. She drew David into the drawing-room. But Theo was there. She was standing by the piano, still trembling, David saw, but with something that puzzled him in her eyes. She did not speak, but, as if divining Mrs. Tarpalin's wishes, slipped out of this room also. Then Mrs. Tarpalin turned to David.

"I want you not to come to the library," she said.

"But I must see him, Mrs. Tarpalin."

"I want you not to."

"I must know what he meant. I don't know what he meant."

Mrs. Tarpalin's look seemed to say, "I know you don't. I know you don't."

"Do you know what he meant?" David said suddenly.

Thus challenged, Mrs. Tarpalin, without a moment's hesitation, answered: —

"Yes, Mr. Penstephen, I do."

David's face grew white.

"Did the others know?"

"I don't think so."

"Do other people know — what it was that he meant?"

"Some must. Frank knew."

"You knew when you asked me to stay here?"

"Of course — as if it would make any difference."

"And I don't know," said David, very slowly. "I'm the one all the time who does n't know."

"Mr. Penstephen," said Mrs. Tarpalin desperately, "will you wait for me here?"

"I must see him afterwards."

Mrs. Tarpalin shook her head.

"Oh," she said, "don't you see?"

But he shook his.

"I'm making an appeal to you," she said at last.

"If you see him, you'll fight. You've had horrible provocation. I — I'm Frank's mother, and I should even wish you to. But I can't have it. I can't have it. Oh, my dear boy, if you knew how I'm on your side — how we all are. I am unchristian enough to wish him thrashed as he deserves. But I just can't have it. Now, will you wait here?"

"Yes, I'll wait here," said David. "But," he added, "I can't promise about afterwards."

"I'll go to him, then. Shall I send Frank to you?"

"Yes," David said, "I'll get him to tell me."

Mrs. Tarpalin paused, hesitating.

"You would n't rather — that is, you don't think that you ought to give your parents the opportunity — Oh, I don't know how to say this. Ought n't they, perhaps, to be consulted?"

"I don't think so," David said. "If it's something that other people know, I think I ought to know it too."

"Very well," said Mrs. Tarpalin after a further pause. "I'll send Frank to you."

David, left alone, went over to one of the windows and looked out. As his blood cooled down he felt bewildered and even partly stunned, but he experienced no feelings of surprise. All the days of the years of his life seemed in a way to have been leading up to this day. There had always been something, and now he was to know what the something was. It would be the explanation, he knew, of all that had ever happened to him — of such puzzlements as he only dimly remembered. He had no fear. Everything hitherto had fitted into its place in the unconsidered scheme of his life, and knowledge, when he should have that too, would just fit into its place like the rest. He still itched to fight Dunstable, because, whatever the instrument to his hand, Dunstable had used it like a cad; but in his heart he knew that Dunstable himself had but been used as an instrument, and that Dunstable's own quarrel also was with Fate and not man. Meanwhile he felt that he could have done anything in the world for Mrs. Tarpalin.

What was happening in the library? The minutes passed. The numbness left David, and left him restless. He rehearsed again and again the extraordinary scene in the music-room, recalling what each voice had said, what each speaker had looked like. He recalled the silences too. He saw the huddle of the three girls. Miss Davenport, playing Miss Neville, had somehow joined Miss Blake and Miss Aylmer, though, when Dunstable had sprung his mine upon the startled company, she had been on the stage with him. He could see again the men and the boys exchanging glances. He could hear deep breaths. Dunstable's tones were clear in his ears.

"Whatever you call yourself . . . " And, "I know what I'm saying" (twice spoken, this); "And" (to Frank) "you know too"; and the broken sentence, "about as

much right—" broken there by Frank's hand over his mouth. . . .

And for background the calm brown room, with the long windows, so like the long windows at home. Peace behind storm. He thought of his mother. It was for her, he knew, in defence of her, somehow, that he tingled to plant his fist in Dunstable's insolent face. At that, with a sudden catching of the breath, he thought of Theo and knew that she had used him.

"One could strike him — be glad to see him struck — in the face. His face is so — so insolent . . ."

He was pulled up short, and, like a horse dragged to his haunches by the violence of a wrench at the bridle, swaying, beating the air for lost balance, he felt the world swing dizzily round him.

Yes, Theo had used him for her own purposes, yet, using him, Theo too had been used. She no less than Dunstable had been but an instrument in the hands that choose their instruments blindly. If not this one, then another. He, David, was to come by knowledge. This way or that. This way or that.

So, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, his mind worked as he waited.

Yet, when Frank came to him, David, outwardly, at least, was the calmer of the two. On the subject of Dunstable it was Frank who found it difficult to contain himself. He did not try, indeed. Words exploded on his indignant tongue. "But for once," he said, when he had exhausted his vocabulary, "he's heard the truth about himself, and if he ever comes to believe it, I don't envy him."

He shut his lips tightly. It was his hands that were twitching, not David's.

"Never mind him," David said. "It is n't about him I want to talk. I did n't know what he meant — that's my trouble. I've got to, Frank, and you've got to tell me."

"Oh, *he* did n't know what he was saying," Frank said. "He only wanted to be offensive. You were sitting next Theo —"

"Yes, yes, but I've got to know," David said. "He implied that I had no right to my name."

Frank was desperate now.

"Of course you've a right to it. It's your parents' name, is n't it? I tell you, he was mad. He's a lunatic — a raving lunatic, as well as a swine when he loses his temper. I knew we should have rows. Good Lord, what a fool I was!"

But David was not to be put off.

"Did he mean that my parents are n't married?" He faced Frank squarely. "Are n't they married?"

"Yes, they are married. Of course they're married. Oh, why do you go on like this?"

"They are!" Hope returned to him. "You know that they are?"

"Of course they are. I could shew you. You could see for yourself."

He did not follow this up, remembering.

"Then, what did he mean?"

As David himself had done once, long ago in Battersea Park, Frank looked for a way of escape.

"Those wretched people waiting!" he said. "I must tell them this rehearsal's put off —"

"Frank!" David put out his hand.

"Very well," said Frank. "But do, do forgive *us!* I'd give a year of my life that this should n't have happened. I don't know the whole story."

Stumbling and fumbling for words he told then what he knew.

"There's nothing discreditable in it," he said as he finished. "It was quite open and deliberate, as I understand it. A question of views."

Frank was thinking that he would never forget David's face. It was the face of some one listening dispassionately

but very intently. He did not seem moved. He asked a few questions.

Frank, driven, answered as he was able.

Yes or No, Yes or No, as the case might be.

"They married afterwards," he said at last.

"I see. After I was born."

David considered for a few moments.

"He was right, then. I have n't any particular claim to my name."

"Oh," Frank said, "you made me tell you."

There was silence then, during which David thought again, and Frank, setting his teeth, turned to the window.

Into the silence came the sound of a piano. The girls in the music-room had some tact and sense. Emma Blake was filling in the pause there — was making a diversion. It was good of her. She was a silly sort of a girl, but she was being very wise now. They were not all talking about David and the awful 'scene' — that was the message of her playing. He wanted to look round to see if David perceived it. But David was standing quite still, and Frank could n't look round.

Emma Blake was playing Chopin — the waltz which Frank knew as George Sand's Little Dog (surely it ought to be Kitten!) Running after his Tail. Her fingers flew over the keys. On the whole she played very few wrong notes.

Still silence.

What was keeping his mother in the library? What could she be saying to Eric that he had not said? Not that she could say what he had said! She had only to tell the fellow what she thought of him, and to ring for his horse to be brought round. He listened for the sound of the opening or shutting of a door, but he did not hear it. He could only hear the piano and, paradoxically, David's silence.

At the back of his mind, behind his preoccupation, he was trying to settle, to guess even, what was to be done. Could

the theatricals be proceeded with at all? Eric was out of them, that was one good thing, and his part could be filled by Diggory, and for Diggory some one would easily be found. Theo, Eric once gone, would no longer give trouble. But David? Could David go on? Could it be expected of him that he should?

He almost started when David spoke.

"You said you could shew me," David said, and Frank felt as if that was of all things what he had been dreading most to hear David say.

"Yes, of course," he said, but he did not move.

"Now?" said David. "Oh, I see. Of course I should n't be there."

"It's odd, is n't it," he said presently, quite without bitterness, "that I should never have looked myself up."

"It shews how absolutely unsnobbish you are," said Frank gruffly.

"I don't think I ever thought of it," said David.

There was silence again, and then David said: "But it would give the date of the marriage, I suppose?"

"Oh," Frank cried explosively, "ought it to be me? They have n't told you. They must have had their reasons for not telling you."

It was the same thought as Mrs. Tarpalin's.

But David, too, had another thought, which, though he did not know it, was strangely the same as another of Mrs. Tarpalin's.

"No," he said, "you're wrong. They've been hoping that some one would tell me. They've even hoped that I knew. I have only to look back to know that."

His voice shook for the first time. "I know now, that I've seen my mother trying to tell me."

He turned away and walked up and down the room.

"There's one thing you've got to understand," he said, struggling now to keep his voice steady. "My mother's not — not to — to blame. She's *good*. Nobody ever had

such a mother. Whatever she did she believed to be right. No, it's more than that. Whatever she did was right."

Frank groaned.

"Oh, my dear chap," he said, "as if I thought —" He turned away. "Oh, damn you," he said.

"All right," said David. He resumed his pacing. He was piecing things together now.

Betsy and her Day of Rejoicing . . . Yes, and her Cake, and her talk of cakes . . . Yes, and before that the picnics, the singings, the white flowers. And the packing that had been quite unlike other packings, and the grey dress and something about pearl-coloured gloves; and things Betsy had said, lamentations mingling with her rejoicings; directions, too, that she had given. And things his mother had said . . . at the station . . . something about always knowing that she loved them — they were always to know that she loved them — and something in the way she had looked at them, and the way she had held them. And something (before that) in the way Frau Finkel and the servants had waved to them — to his father and mother — when they started . . .

Oh, he knew. He had no need of books to help him. How clear it was. How easily the pieces all fitted into the puzzle once you had the key.

"Yes," he said, "I believe I know exactly when. What I don't know yet is why."

Poor Frank, who had thought the worst was over, felt himself grow crimson. At the sight of him for one dreadful moment David doubted. The colour mounted to his own face, and ebbed, leaving it white. Then he gave what was almost a shout of relief.

For, as on the evening of his arrival, across the long years and out of the dimnesses which yet were not so dim but that he could pierce them, there had come to him the vision of Frau Finkel, Betsy, and the waiting telegram: Frau Finkel urging; Betsy going on with her work; the disputed

envelope just waiting. This time the vision had meaning. All night that envelope, its contents unknown, had lain on the nursery mantelpiece waiting his parents' return.

"They did n't know," he said. "They were married before they knew, and that's all that matters."

"Oh, *damn* you," Frank said again, choking.

CHAPTER IX

No, on that memorable day when they had set out so mysteriously from Homburg, they had not known (and could not have anticipated) the change that was imminent in their fortunes. Two lives had stood then between them and what David knew indeed to have been as uncoveted as it was unforeseen. The injury which had been done to him by the belated marriage seemed a small thing beside the shame that would have been his if a mere change in their fortunes had been enough to overthrow the beliefs (or unbeliefs) by which they had lived, and for which his mother, at least, had made her supreme sacrifice. But, whatever the explanation of their marriage, it was not that. The conditions which had allowed them not to marry, had been the same conditions which had allowed them to marry. So much was certain. He blessed Frau Finkel's inquisitive urgings and Betsy's dignified obstinacy which had caused the telegram to remain in his mind.

And David, piecing, piecing together, learnt more and more, as the pattern of the great puzzle which was his life declared itself. And as he pieced and pieced, collecting, rejecting, selecting, discarding, the pattern, whatever the intricacies of its whole design, began to show more and more clearly the features of an enshrined portrait — the portrait of his mother. When at length the picture stood revealed, it reminded him, the many galleries he had seen in the days of the wandering giving his thoughts colour and form, of many Madonnas, many of the chosen Marys, with or without the divine rays which he (and his mother) knew as 'Annunciations,' but always with the haloes that, by the same association, he had grown to think of as the crowns that come by suffering.

How his mother had suffered! As, by the light of his newly gained knowledge, he looked back over the half-remembered, half-forgotten days, he saw, for the first time, into the meaning of them and could guess how she had suffered. The light turned here and there, probing, searching. To the steady ray brought thus to bear upon them, all the little memories and impressions of his childhood yielded up their secrets, — each secret a piece to fit presently into its place with the rest. Nothing that had happened to him but was seen newly; nor was it the keenness of the searchlight only that made the shadows look so black.

So he searched and pieced, searched and pieced, and came by further knowledge. Everything furnished something. Reconsidered, many a fragment, which at first he had rejected as useless, or which he had discarded as superfluous, found its billet. What unexpected findings were here! What surprising dovetailings! How clear the emerging significances and indications!

He knew now why his mother had been condemned to the nomad life — she, whose instincts and activities were all domestic. How she must have hated it. He could guess at the reasons for such sudden disintegrating upheavals as that which had routed them all out of Brussels and deposited them in Homburg. To such strikings and repitchings of the tent, her life must cruelly have accustomed her. When he thought of her in Cheyne Walk he knew how cruelly. But he also saw (as we have seen) how, longing for a home, she had contrived that her children should never know what they lacked, or that they lacked anything. They had lacked nothing. The caravan to them had been abiding as any house. Memories clung for them — for David, anyway, and he thought he could have answered for Georgina too — round railway carriages with their wide netted racks like mangers, and their blue or grey upholsterings, and their flapping curtains on the ivory rings. Carriage was linked to carriage by a feeling of which the holland-covered box, perhaps, was the outward and visible sign, and

the atmosphere created by his mother certainly the inward and spiritual grace. The railway carriages were just rooms in the children's great home, and rooms so like each other that to them they were the same rooms. The rooms in the hotels and the lodging-houses were for them just other rooms. The children thus had a big delightful home, ever changing, ever the same. It was their mother only who had none. Yet her suffering, David knew, was always for them.

And so, gradually, David arrived at the answer even to his second question. He knew why his parents had not married; he knew now why they had.

He could not yet think quite calmly of his father. However willing his mother might have been to make her sacrifice upon the altar of his and her own beliefs, he should not have asked it of her. All too late she had seen the impossibility of the conditions she had accepted. You could not live outside the law. Oh, David knew why the tardy marriage had taken place.

And, as he looked at the enshrined portrait, it told him more. It had the sad tranquil outlook which was his mother's always when her face was in repose — which, if he had known it, was even his own. But her eyes had not always been tranquil. He could remember them with almost a hunted look in them. They had worn this look at the time of the arrival in England. No one would have supposed that, child as he was, he could have noticed it; but he had noticed it and he had remembered it. They had worn it at a later period too. And there was another look that had haunted him — the look she had turned on him when he had been taken in to see her after Johnny was born. . . .

In her extremity she had been trying to say something to him then. He had felt its purport dimly; he knew it now.

His face lit up; was illumined, as it were, from within: — Like the stone which the builders rejected and which became the head stone of the corner, one stubborn piece which had baffled him again and again fitted smoothly into

its place. His eyes filled with sudden tears. Johnny himself had been as unexpected at the time of the marriage as the passing of the two sound lives . . .

It was the ultimate enlightenment.

He might break up the puzzle now, sweep the pieces together, put them away in their box. They could yield him nothing more.

Not Mary herself, waiting in Cheyne Walk, could have added a word or a thought to the telling if it had fallen to her — though, as she perceived how he took it, she might, for the pride she would have felt in him, have wished that she had indeed had the anguish of the telling!

For, looking into his heart, as she, we need not doubt, would have been able to do, she would have seen that no bitterness was there, nor any envy, nor any repining. His love for her was unshaken, his esteem for her, his trust in her. Even for the brother who all unwittingly had usurped the birthright that should have been his, his feelings had undergone no change. No, David's affections had stood the great test on all counts but perhaps one. It will be true of him to say that, though he still hurried his thoughts away from his father, he was glad that Johnny was there — there, for his own sake; there, to be loved as he loved him; there, especially, maybe, to carry on the name which he himself had indeed no right to bear.

CHAPTER X

DESCENT then to the things of the moment. And yet not so great a descent either, for, if the things of the moment were trivial in themselves, they were urgent also, and there were, as Mrs. Tarpalin saw, — to her pride in the guest she had come well-nigh to love! — big as well as small ways of dealing with them. All was well, and even for the interrupted undertaking all was to be well also.

She knew that, as soon as she saw David's face. Afterwards she always spoke of it as 'transfigured.' It was so, anyway, that she saw it when she came back to the drawing-room.

Her own face was tremulous. She had had a curious experience with Dunstable.

"He's going," she said, and paused. "I wanted you not to see him," she said then, coming over to David and laying her hand on his arm. "Now I want to know if you will."

She did not say what had passed between them. With that look on David's face there was, she felt, no need.

"Yes, of course I'll see him," David said without hesitation.

He in his turn was always to remember that she asked no assurances of him.

She watched him go from the room, and set herself to wait.

She went over to the fireplace and straightened the ornaments on the mantelpiece. Frank had disarranged them, or perhaps even David. Frank, it was probable. Then she sat down and closed her eyes. Five minutes passed; ten. She clasped and unclasped her hands. She was listening acutely for sounds, but she had not any fear. She saw from David's look when he came back that everything had fallen out as she had expected.

"Oh," she said, "you don't need that I should tell you what I feel, or what I think of you."

But David had something to say that must be said quickly. Dunstable had asked for his horse. What David had to say must be said and answered before the horse came round.

"Mrs. Tarpalin," he said, a little breathlessly, "do you want him to go?"

"Indeed I do," was on her tongue, but David's look arrested the words before they had passed her lips.

"You did," David was saying; "but do you now? If any one goes, ought n't it to be me?"

"I'd give up the whole thing rather than that," she said emphatically.

"But it must n't be given up," David said.

"Well, that is the question," Mrs. Tarpalin said. "I want you to do exactly as you like. Oh, I do mean this in spite of what I myself may wish."

"The play must n't be given up," David said again.

"I want you not to consider us at all. Please, please — "

"Then I think it would even be easier for me," he said.

Her eyes questioned his. She hoped so much that he would not go, but she did so honestly want not to bias him.

"Would n't you like time to think it over?"

"I have had time," he said.

"Or even to go home for a night?"

"No," he said, — "unless you thought it would be better?"

"I'm afraid I have shewn only too plainly what I want," Mrs. Tarpalin said, smiling, "but that must not influence you."

"I should like to stay, then, and see the thing through," David replied. "But I should like more than that. I should like things as far as possible to go on as if nothing had happened."

"They will," said Mrs. Tarpalin. "Of course they will."

"Yes, but Dunstable."

"Do you mean you really want him to stay?"

"You've seen him," David said.

"Oh, I'm sorry enough for him. He's abjectly ashamed of himself, I know that. I quite believe that his tongue ran away with him — ran amok, indeed. But that's no excuse. He was unspeakable. He behaved like a cad."

"He says that," David said.

There was what seemed to be a long pause, and time pressed. David chafed a little. For, with a clearness that came perhaps of the stress of the emotions he had experienced, he had seen that for every one's sake the going of Dunstable must be averted. Dunstable was down. It would be like kicking him to let him go. He did not think of himself unduly. For himself, indeed, he did not greatly care, but he did care very greatly for the honour of Red Alban, which, for the moment, was bound up with his own, and he saw clearly that scandal on his account must not attach itself to these theatricals.

And, behind all this, a strange new feeling for Dunstable himself, who, howsoever indefensible his action had been, and howsoever little claim he had to any one's consideration, had done him the service which even his mother with all her love for him — though of her very love for him — had not been able to do him. By Dunstable's outrageous savagery, David stood now with eyes unbound; forewarned; forearmed; equipped.

"I must speak to Frank," Mrs. Tarpalin said at last.

"But it will be too late then. He'll be gone."

"I'll ask him to put off going for five minutes. I'll find a reason."

She came back to say, "I'm going to have some difficulty with Frank and perhaps every one else. But I think you are right, and I don't care whether you like to hear it or not, I think you're — I think you're —"

She could not say it.

We follow the lady.

Dunstable was coming out of the library as she left the drawing-room.

"Eric, wait a minute, please."

She gave him no reason. After all, if she failed, she could tell him. Indeed, whether she failed or not, she was determined that he should know that David had wished him to stay. Sorry as she reluctantly was for him, she still felt vindictive if David did not. Dunstable bent his head in silence and went back to the library. And then she felt sorry again.

"But it will do him all the good in the world," she said to herself. "If he comes out of this alive, it may make a gentleman of him yet."

She had reached the door of the music-room. She opened it and went in.

"Frank, I want you," she said.

Somebody had been as tactful as Emma Blake who had played. Cards had been found. The waiting company were filling up the time with a little mild gambling.

At the sight of their occupation she changed her mind.

Frank had come toward her.

"No," she said, "I think I'll put it to you all."

Without any preliminaries she plunged into what she had come to say.

They heard her attentively.

It seemed best to her, even in the presence of the three young girls, to touch on David's history. She said briefly that his parents were unorthodox, and that, for the period which had unfortunately covered his entrance into the world, they had had the courage of opinions which they had seen good to modify later. Whether they had been justified or not concerned no one in that room. What did concern them, one and all, was the terrible use that had been made of the knowledge by some one whom she need not name, but who was now heartily and remorsefully and even pitiably ashamed of himself.

"So he ought to be," from Frank, under his breath. "My God! so he ought to be."

"Yes, Frank, and I am telling you that he is. We know that control of his temper is n't his strong point. We may take the charitable view, I think, and believe that for the moment he was n't responsible. Since he has come to himself he has made Mr. Penstephen his profound apology. Now, the question for us to determine is whether we can go on with our play. We only can, I think, if we can put what has happened out of our minds altogether. Can we do this?"

"What does David Penstephen say?" Frank asked.

When they heard that David wished the play to proceed there was a sudden burst of cheers for him.

David must have heard it from the drawing-room; Dunstable, even, from the distant library.

"And he'll go on with his part?" Frank said. He turned to the rest comprehensively. "We would n't unless."

There was another shout.

Mrs. Tarpalin faltered. "Oh, everybody here," she said, "if I ever felt proud of any one under this roof . . . No, I know I can't speak, Frank, but if I could I should find it difficult to say what I felt for him."

"Oh, Mother," Frank said, "and you're doing it so beautifully."

There was a shout for Mrs. Tarpalin. Every one, not the girls only, seemed to be trying to hold her dimpled hands.

"But wait," she said, "wait! You have n't heard. You won't like it. But it makes it ten times bigger."

There was silence when David's full wish became known. Looks were exchanged.

Emma Blake broke the silence.

"It's huge of him. Oo, absolutely huge of him!"

"It's also exactly like him," said Mrs. Tarpalin quietly.

"But it's out of the question," said Frank. "Good Lord! You can't wipe things out like that. A man who

would do what Eric Dunstable did is n't fit to know. No, Mother, it's impossible." He turned to the others. "Is n't it?"

There was not a voice for Dunstable. The room was filled with clamour. Every thumb was down. But Mrs. Tarpalin held up her hand.

"One moment!" she said. "Frank, I know what you feel, I know what we all feel. If I followed my own inclinations I should n't move a finger to stop his going — though I think I should be wrong. But with due deference to everybody, there is only one person whose wishes we have to consider, and that is Mr. Penstephen."

There was a murmur of agreement upon that, and then again silence.

"But can we bear it?" said Frank.

"If he can. And after all, though he says it would make things easier for him, he's really thinking of us."

"If it did that," said Miss Davenport, and struck the right note.

Mrs. Tarpalin thought it might.

"There's Theo," said Frank, at last.

"Yes, I have n't forgotten Theo. But before I speak to her I want to know what you all feel. If we go on it must be as if nothing had happened."

"As if" — she turned to Frank again and underlined every word — "nothing, do you understand me, had happened."

Frank fidgeted and looked round.

"I think Mrs. Tarpalin's right," Welwyn said.

Every one cordially if reluctantly thought so. Frank was the last to assent.

"But cheerfully?" said Mrs. Tarpalin. "Not grudgingly as of necessity. Cheerful givers?"

Cheerful.

They promised her.

But in the end it was David who carried the thing through, for he it was who tackled Miss Nevern success-

fully, after a somewhat heated Mrs. Tarpalin had failed with her, and he it was who prevailed with the shamed Dunstable.

"I can't face them," Dunstable said. "I can't; it's no good."

But David, linking his arm through his, said, "We'll face them together."

So the rehearsals were resumed and peace was restored, or, more accurately, where no peace had been, peace was established. Even the inscrutable Theo was amenable. But she was to remain inscrutable. If her wish had been to rid herself of Dunstable, she had attained her wish and more than her wish. For it was David now who seemed master of Dunstable's jealous heart. The sore sullen young man followed him with his eyes like a beaten faithful dog. And Theo seemed satisfied.

"You shewed me Eric," we may suppose ourselves to hear her saying, if we may hazard a guess! "You shewed me Eric, and freed me."

"You shewed me Theo," we may suppose Eric Dunstable to say in turn. "You shewed me Theo and freed me."

But what had really happened was that between them they had shewn David to himself and freed him.

He wrote two letters that night. One was a long long happy one to his mother in Chelsea. Everything was in it that could make glad her heart — everything that could ease her, solace her, make up to her for past suffering. Love was the keynote of this letter — love and understanding, and undimmed hope. Nothing more than the truth.

We may know that it made Mary happy.

The other letter was to his old friend of the shop.

"You said that when the time came you could help me. Was it at Margate that you thought I stood a chance of getting the training I should want? I was to start at the

bottom, was n't I? and play everything — be General Utility if need be — or was it Call Boy? Well, I am ready, and not afraid of work. And another thing: you once said that you wished my circumstances made it necessary that I should earn my own living. They don't quite do that, perhaps, but they make it very urgent that I should make — try at least to make — some sort of a name for myself. And I swear by all I hold sacred — or, by Skelt, shall I say, of the Minories, Redington of Hoxton, and Webb of Old Street, St. Luke's! — that if it is in me I mean to do that or die. I don't mean to give in."

That, too, was true.

And here, as he stands on the threshold of a new life, but a life that has its foundations firmly cemented in the enduring fabric of the old, we may, I think, in all hope and confidence, leave him. He could turn an enemy into a friend; more, in very truth, perhaps, like the oyster of his boyish fancy, make pearls of the grits sent to wound him. Why not a great pearl, then, of the great grit of all? A name of his namelessness.

The way at least was open to him now to the land of his heart's desire. Not his mother, even, would wish to hold him back. . . .

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